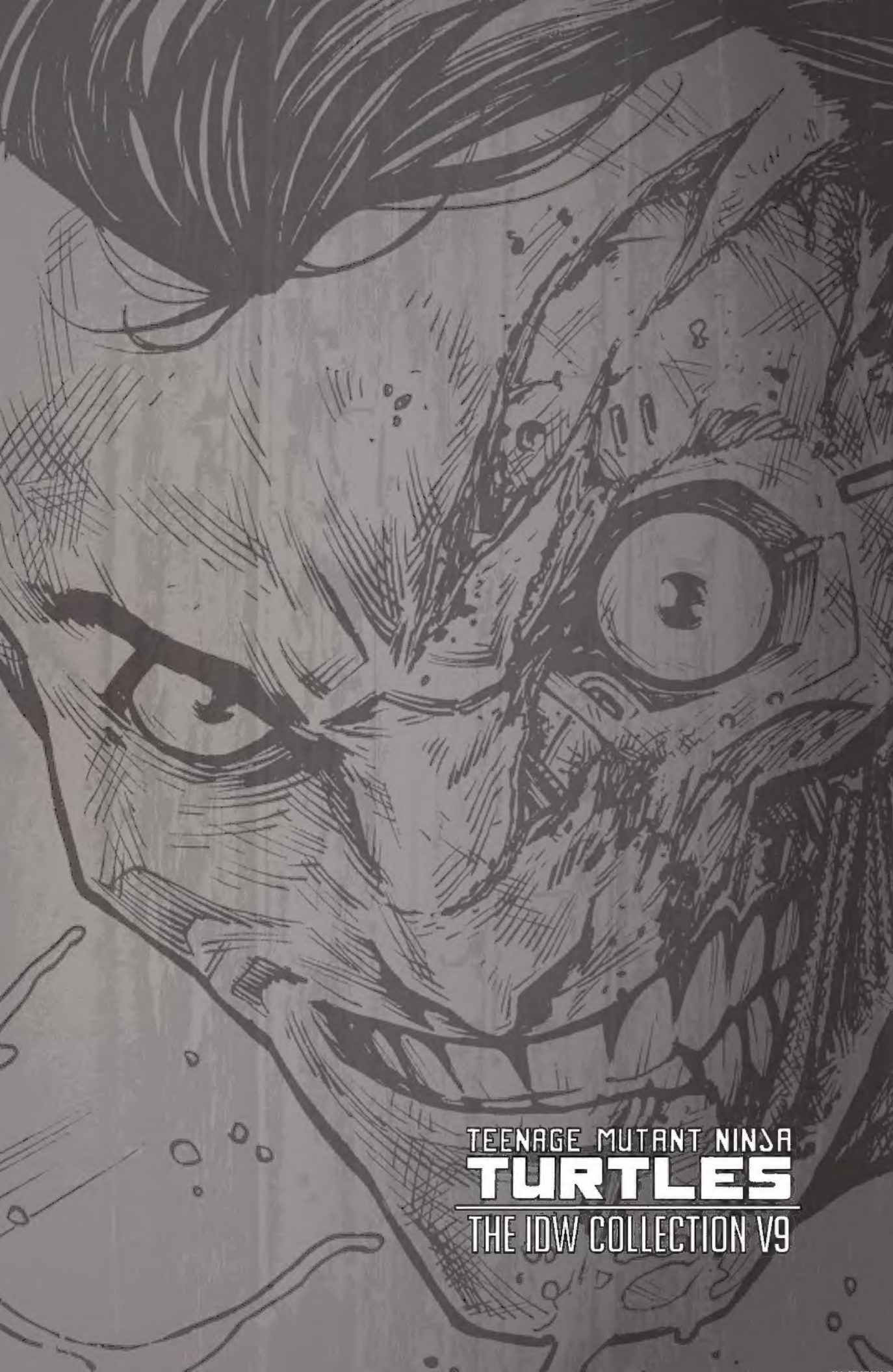
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA
TURTLES
THE IDW COLLECTION V9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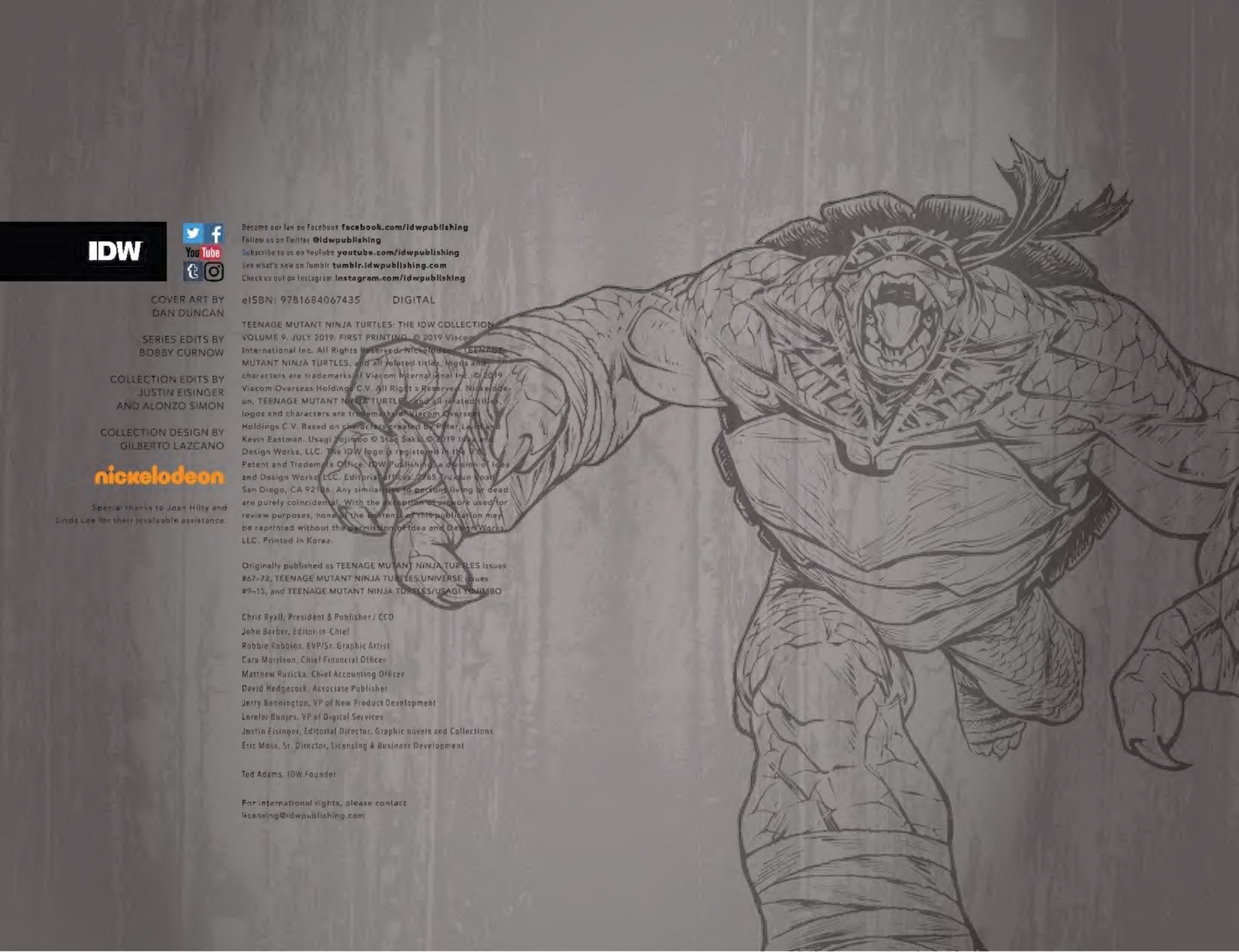

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ISSUE #67 ..... pg 06
story by KEVIN EASTMAN, BOBBY CURNOW, & TOM WALTZ
script by TOM WALTZ art by MATEUS SANTOLOUCO
colors by RONDA PATTISON letters by SHAWN LEE & CHRIS MOWRY

ISSUE #68 ..... pg 28
story by KEVIN EASTMAN, BOBBY CURNOW, & TOM WALTZ
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ISSUE #69 ..... pg 50
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"TORO BARON'S BALL" ..... pg 94
script by SOPHIE CAMPBELL & BOBBY CURNOW
art by PABLO TUNICA letters by SHAWN LEE

UNIVERSE #10:
"TORO BARON'S BALL" ..... pg 116
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art by PABLO TUNICA letters by SHAWN LEE

ISSUE #71 ..... pg 138
story by KEVIN EASTMAN, BOBBY CURNOW, & TOM WALTZ
script by TOM WALTZ art by DAVE WACHTER
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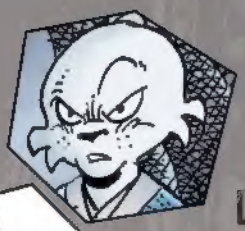

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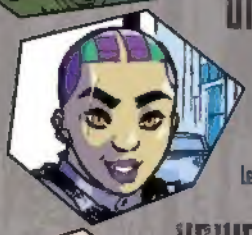
script by RICH DOUEK art by AARON CONLEY
colors by TRIONA FARRELL letters by SHAWN LEE



UNIVERSE #12:
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script by ERIK BURNHAM & SOPHIE CAMPBELL
art by SOPHIE CAMPBELL colors by BRITTANY PEER
letters by SHAWN LEE

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UNIVERSE #14:
"KARAI'S PATH" ..... pg 294

script by ERIK BURNHAM & SOPHIE CAMPBELL
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UNIVERSE #15:
"KARAI'S PATH" ..... pg 316

script by ERIK BURNHAM & SOPHIE CAMPBELL
art by SOPHIE CAMPBELL colors by BRITTANY PEER
letters by SHAWN LEE

UNIVERSE #12-15:
"PREY" ..... pg 338

story, art, and letters by SOPHIE CAMPBELL

ISSUE #67

art by MATEUS SANTOLOUCO

"EVERY KID GOT A TURTLE SOME TIME OR OTHER. NOBODY CAN'T KEEP A TURTLE THOUGH."
The GRAPES of WRATH
"THEY WORK AT IT AND WORK AT IT, AND AT LAST ONE DAY THEY GET OUT AND AWAY THEY GO-OFF SOMEWHERES."
"IT'S LIKE ME."
HUH. HOW INTERESTING.
IT'S JUST LIKE ME, TOO.
COO?
WHAT'S THAT, JIMMY?
COO COO?
OH, THIS?
JUST A LITTLE STEINBECK TO PASS THE TIME. LINDSEY LOANED IT TO ME.
SHE TOLD ME IT'S AN AMERICAN CLASSIC AND I CAN SEE WHY. IT'S REALLY SOMETHING.
COO!
KEEP READING? SURE THING, MY FRIEND.
ALWAYS HAPPY TO ACCOMMODATE A FELLOW CONNOISSEUR OF FINE LITERATURE.
LET'S SEE... WHERE WERE WE? OH, YES—JIM CASY WAS TALKING TO TOM JOAD.
"IT'S LIKE ME. I WOULDN'T TAKE THE GOOD OL' GOSPEL THAT WAS JUST LAYIN' THERE TO MY HAND. I GOT TO BE PICKIN' AT IT AN' WORKIN' AT IT..."
The GRAPES of WRATH
by John Steinbeck

"...UNTIL I GOT IT ALL TORE DOWN!"
RRRRMBLE
COO?!
FLY, JIMMY-
-WE'RE FALLING!

UNG...
FIRE!
FUPP
FUPP
FUPP
BWOOM
GRAAH!
TRANK THAT THING! NOW!
FUDT
FUDT
FUDT
SHNK
SHNK
SHNK
HUH?

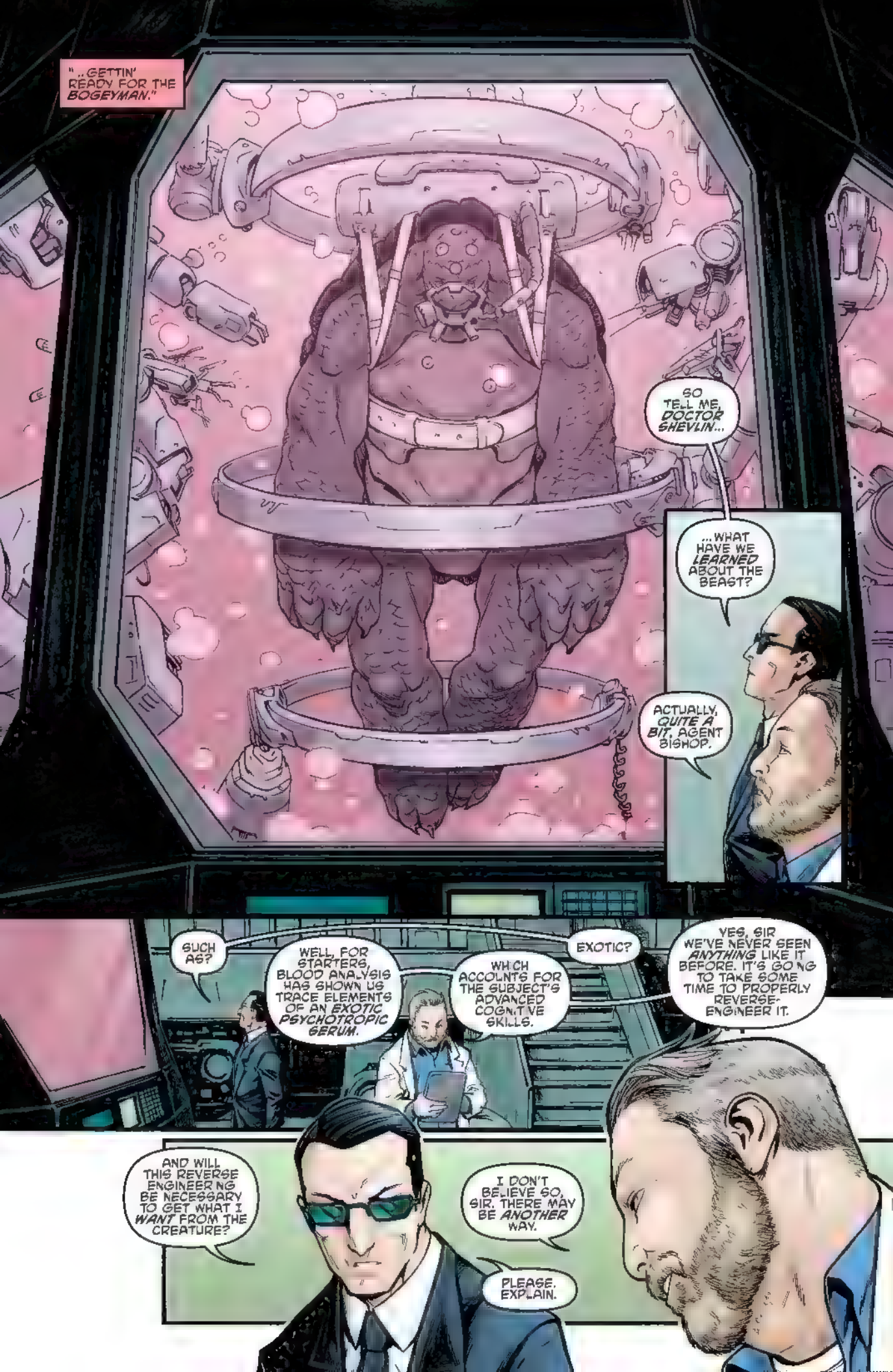
THUD
TANGO IS CONFIRMED DOWN.
ROGER.
EXCELLENT WORK, DARKWATER.
AGREED, SERGEANT WINTER.
"LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE TCRI FIASCO HAVE CERTAINLY BEGUN TO PAY OFF."
COPY THAT, AGENT BISHOP.
WHAT NOW?
NOW WE BAG THIS BEAST AND GET IT BACK TO THE EPF LABS.
TIME TO COMMENCE PHASE TWO.
*AS SEEN IN TMNT UNIVERSE #1.4 — B.C.

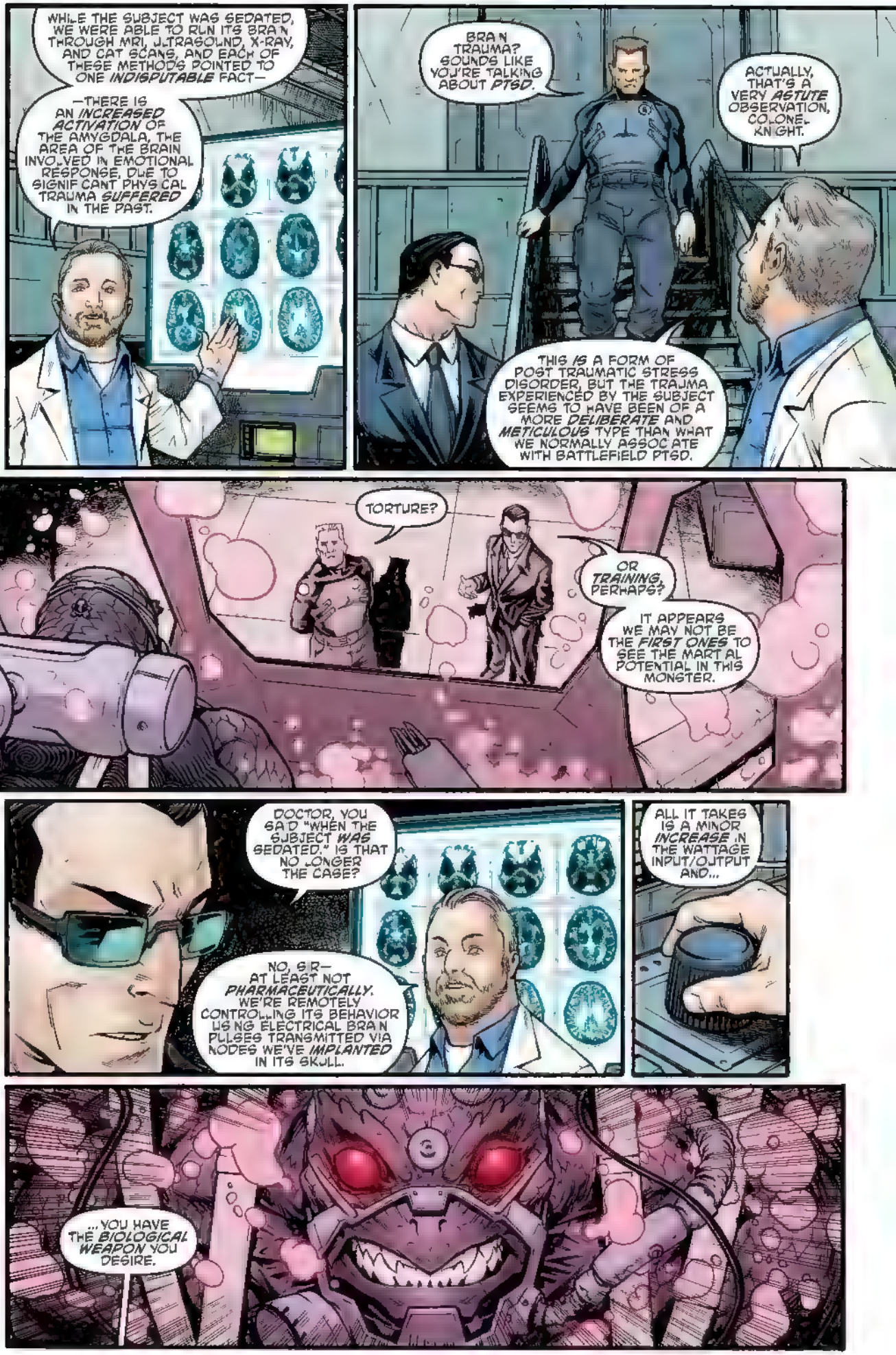
WHAT'S THIS?
HM.
The GRAPES of WRATH
by John Steinbeck
FWUMP
WRATH, INDEED.
COO?

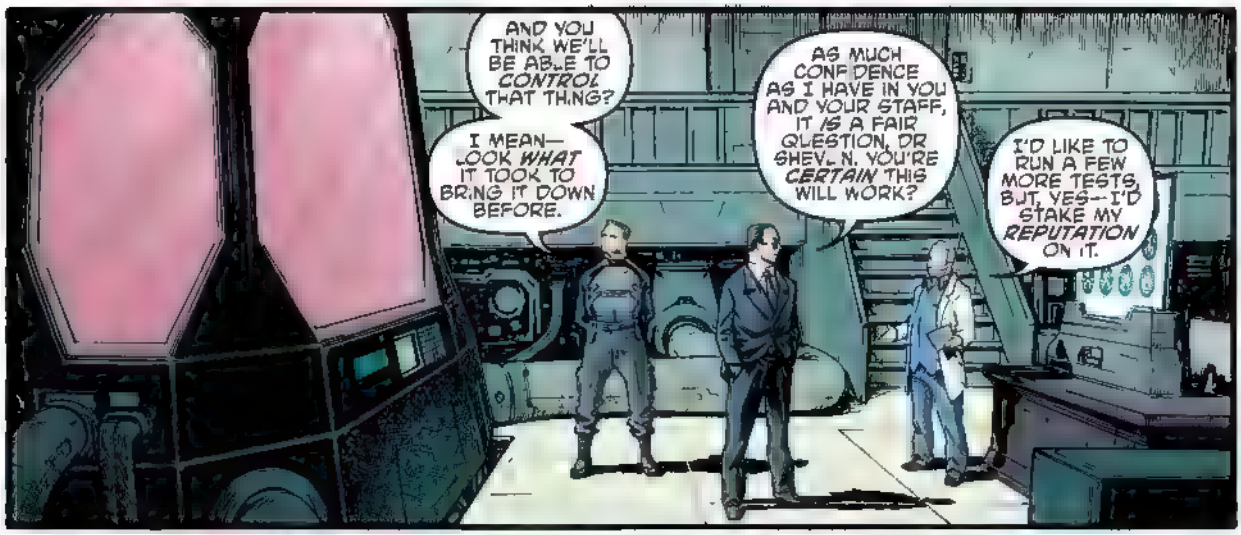
ALL RIGHT, WHO'S THE BIRD BRAIN?!
HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU GUYS, MY TABLET IS NOT A COASTER!
SORRY, BRO...
...BUT LEO SAID IF I MADE ANOTHER FRUIT PUNCH RING ON THE COUNTER, HE WAS GONNA RING MY NECK.
SURE. JUST THROW ME UNDER THE BUS, MIKE.
THANKS FOR THE UPDATE, ANGEL...
...I'LL TALK AT YA LATER.
HOW ARE THINGS GOING?
REAL GOOD. ANGEL SAYS ALOPEX IS DOIN' BETTER EVERY DAY.

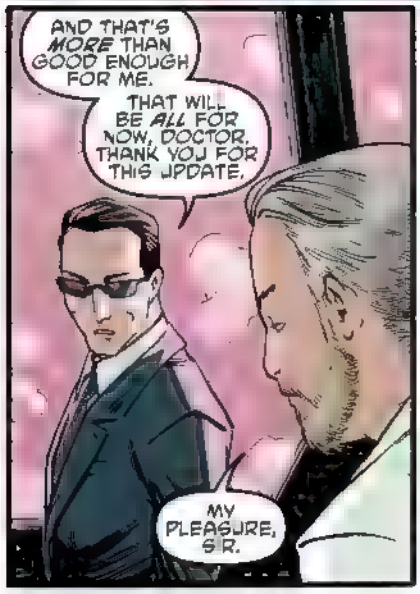
I'M GLAD TO HEAR SHE'S ON THE MEND.
IT'LL BE GREAT TO HAVE HER AND ANGEL BACK IN THE FIGHT—THE SOONER THE BETTER.
WAIT WHAT?
WHAT FIGHT ARE YOU TALK'N' ABOUT, EXACTLY? SEEMS LIKE THINGS ARE PRETTY CHILL RIGHT NOW.
CHILL OR NOT, THERE'S STILL PLENTY GOING ON, RAPH, AND MOST OF IT BAD.
YEAH? LIKE WHAT?
SERIOUSLY?
THE PANTHEON. THE UTROMS. THOSE GOVERNMENT FORCES. LEATHERHEAD.
ANY OF THOSE RING A BELL? SHOULD I KEEP GOING TO HELP YOU REMEMBER?
YEAH, YEAH—SHOVE THE SARCASM, LEO. I AIN'T STUPID.
AND LIKE I SAID, ALL THAT JUNK'S QUIET RIGHT NOW, SO WHAT'S YOUR RUSH?
MY "RUSH" IS FOR US TO PREPARE FOR THAT "JUNK" WHEN ANY OR ALL OF IT DECIDES NOT TO BE SO QUIET ANYMORE.

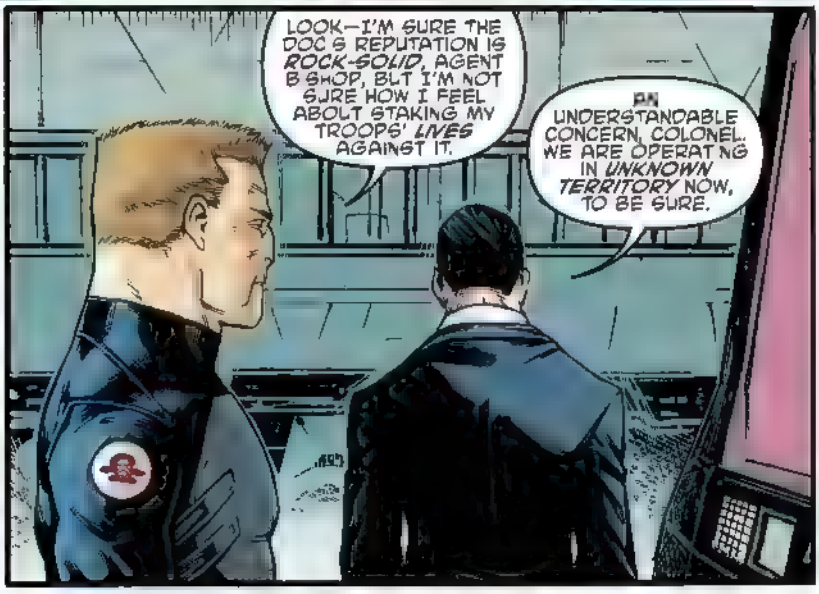
YEAH, WELL, WE AIN'T IN THE FOOT CLAN AND YOU AIN'T FATHER'S LITTLE CHUNIN ANYMORE, SO I'M GONNA ENJOY SOME OF THIS DOWNTIME WHILE YOU PREPARE ALL YOU WANT.
BUT—
WE SHOULD TOTALLY BE FIGHTIN' CRIME.
OH, NO... NOT YOUR STUPID COMIC BOOK STUFF AGAIN, MIKEY.
IT'S NOT STUPID, DONNIE, AND IT'S NOT LIKE MY COMIC BOOKS
'CAUSE IF IT WAS, WE'D HAVE A RAD CAR AND A GIANT MANSION AND A LOYAL BUTLER
I'M JUST SAYIN', MAYBE IT'S TIME WE STOP THINKIN' ABOUT OURSELVES SO MUCH AND START TAKIN' CARE OF OTHERS YOU KNOW—OUT ON THE STREETS.
THAT SOUNDS EVEN DUMBER THAN WHAT LEO WAS TALKIN' 'BOUT. IF WE START STICKIN' OUR NOSES INTO EVERY MUGGIN' IN THIS TOWN, WE'D NEVER GET A BREAK.
NAH, I STILL SAY WE LAY LOW FOR A WHILE AND WAIT FOR THINGS TO COME TO US... IF THEY EVEN DO.
BESIDES, WHAT GOOD IS STOPPING PETTY CRIME IF WE DON'T STOP THE ETERNAL DEMI-GODS FROM MESSING WITH US?
IF WE'RE GONNA HAVE A CHANCE OF LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD, WE'RE GONNA REQUIRE NEW TECH, WHICH IS WHAT I'M TRYING TO FOCUS ON NOW THAT HAROLD'S NOT HELPING US ANYMORE.
AND WHICH I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO IF YOU KEEP USING MY GEAR FOR DINNERWARE!
I SAID I WAS SORRY, DUDE!
MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A PROBLEM IF YOU TOOK BETTER CARE OF YOUR NERD TOYS, EINSTEIN.
YEAH!
HEH. SAYS THE MUSCLE-HEAD WHO LEAVES BARBELLS LYING ALL OVER THE PLACE OR IN YOUR CASE... DUMBBELLS.
THIS... IS HOPELESS.
HEY, WHERE'S LEO GONE?
KNOWIN' HIM...

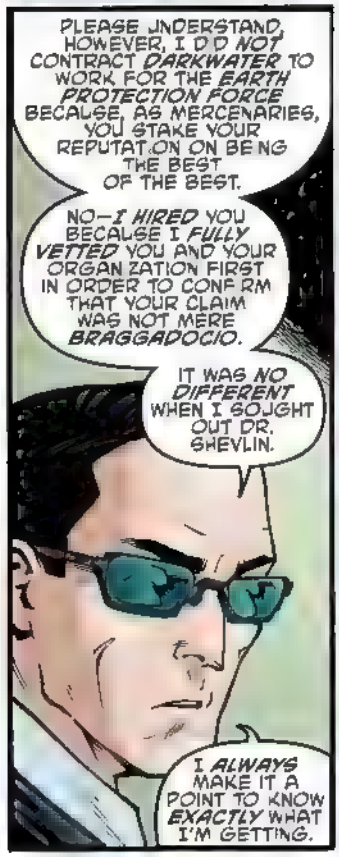

"...GETTIN' READY FOR THE BOGEYMAN."
SO TELL ME, DOCTOR SHEVLIN...
...WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE BEAST?
ACTUALLY, QUITE A BIT, AGENT BISHOP.
SUCH AS?
WELL, FOR STARTERS, BLOOD ANALYSIS HAS SHOWN US TRACE ELEMENTS OF AN EXOTIC PSYCHOTROPIC SERUM.
WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR THE SUBJECT'S ADVANCED COGNITIVE SKILLS.
EXOTIC?
YES, SIR WE'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE. IT'S GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME TO PROPERLY REVERSE-ENGINEER IT.
AND WILL THIS REVERSE ENGINEERING BE NECESSARY TO GET WHAT I WANT FROM THE CREATURE?
I DON'T BELIEVE SO, SIR. THERE MAY BE ANOTHER WAY.
PLEASE. EXPLAIN.


WHILE THE SUBJECT WAS SEDATED, WE WERE ABLE TO RUN ITS BRAIN THROUGH MRI, ULTRASOUND, X-RAY, AND CAT SCANS, AND EACH OF THESE METHODS POINTED TO ONE *INDISPUTABLE* FACT—
—THERE IS AN *INCREASED ACTIVATION* OF THE AMYGDALA, THE AREA OF THE BRAIN INVOLVED IN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE, DUE TO SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL TRAUMA *SUFFERED* IN THE PAST.
BRAIN TRAUMA? SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT *PTSD*.
ACTUALLY, THAT'S A VERY *ASTUTE* OBSERVATION, COLONEL KNIGHT.
THIS *IS* A FORM OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER, BUT THE TRAUMA EXPERIENCED BY THE SUBJECT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN OF A MORE *DELIBERATE* AND *METICULOUS* TYPE THAN WHAT WE NORMALLY ASSOCIATE WITH BATTLEFIELD PTSD.
TORTURE?
OR *TRAINING*, PERHAPS?
IT APPEARS WE MAY NOT BE THE *FIRST ONES* TO SEE THE MARTIAL POTENTIAL IN THIS MONSTER.
DOCTOR, YOU SAID "WHEN THE SUBJECT *WAS* SEDATED." IS THAT NO LONGER THE CASE?
NO, SIR— AT LEAST NOT *PHARMACEUTICALLY*. WE'RE REMOTELY CONTROLLING ITS BEHAVIOR USING ELECTRICAL BRAIN PULSES TRANSMITTED VIA NODES WE'VE *IMPLANTED* IN ITS SKULL.
ALL IT TAKES IS A MINOR *INCREASE* IN THE WATTAGE INPUT/OUTPUT AND...
...YOU HAVE THE *BIOLOGICAL WEAPON* YOU DESIRE.

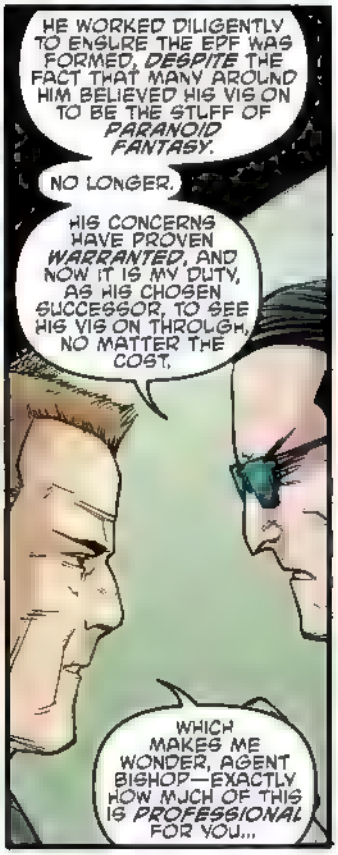

AND YOU THINK WE'LL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THAT THING?
I MEAN—LOOK WHAT IT TOOK TO BRING IT DOWN BEFORE.
AS MUCH CONFIDENCE AS I HAVE IN YOU AND YOUR STAFF, IT IS A FAIR QUESTION, DR. SHEVLIN. YOU'RE CERTAIN THIS WILL WORK?
I'D LIKE TO RUN A FEW MORE TESTS, BUT, YES—I'D STAKE MY REPUTATION ON IT.

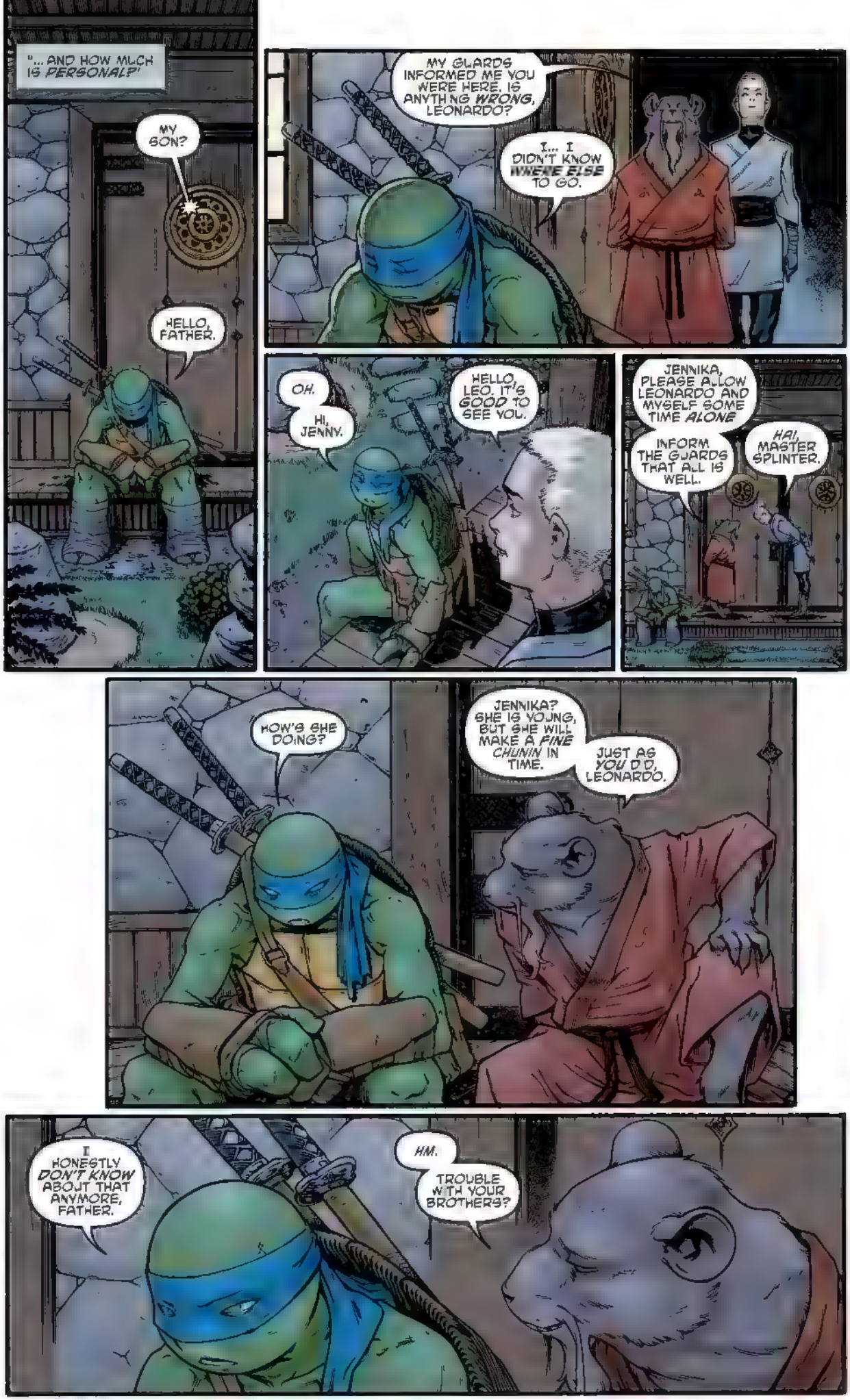

AND THAT'S MORE THAN GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME.
THAT WILL BE ALL FOR NOW, DOCTOR. THANK YOU FOR THIS UPDATE.
MY PLEASURE, SIR.

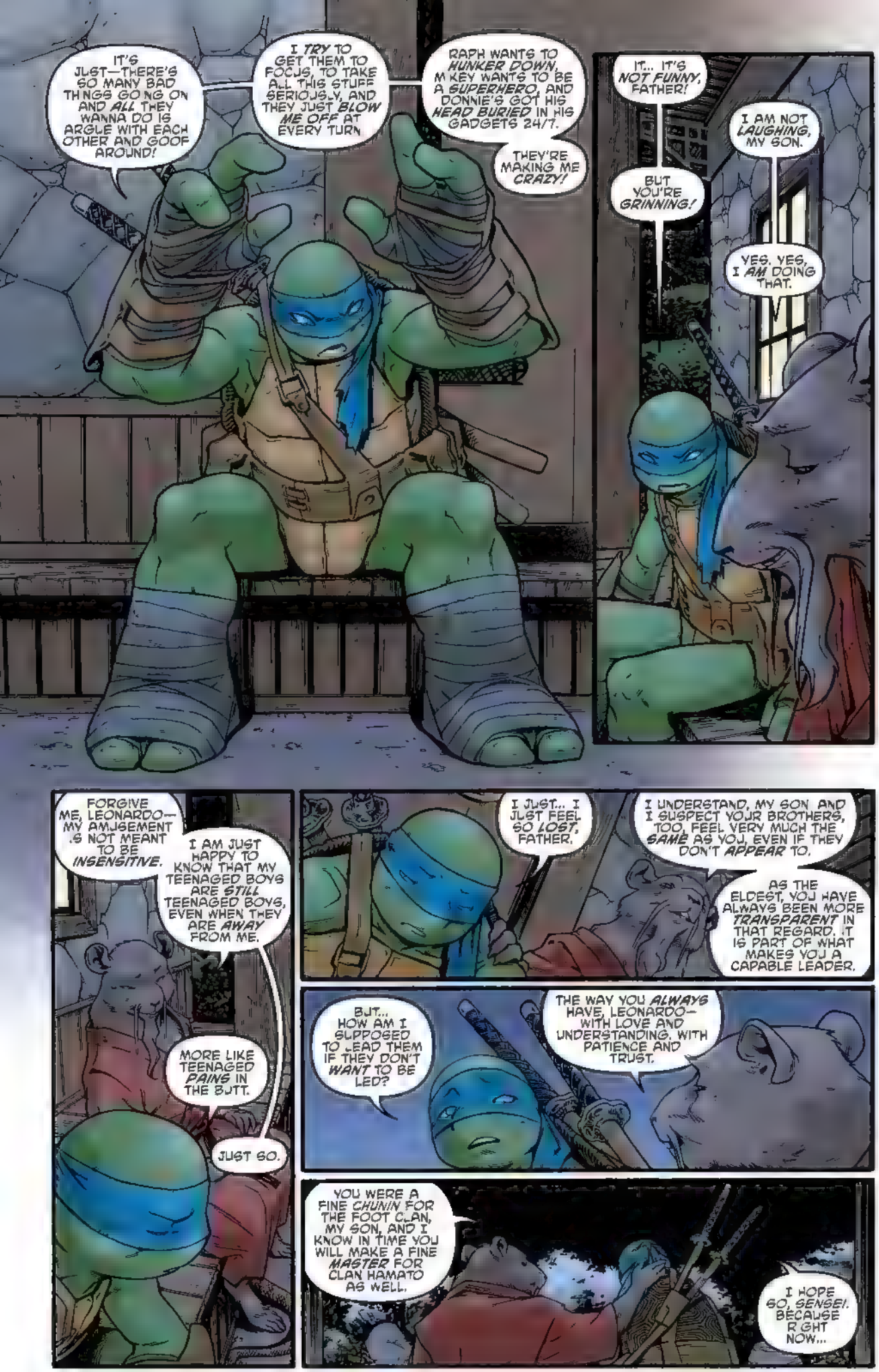

LOOK—I'M SURE THE DOC'S REPUTATION IS ROCK-SOLID, AGENT BISHOP, BUT I'M NOT SURE HOW I FEEL ABOUT STAKING MY TROOPS' LIVES AGAINST IT.
UNDERSTANDABLE CONCERN, COLONEL. WE ARE OPERATING IN UNKNOWN TERRITORY NOW, TO BE SURE.


PLEASE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, I DID NOT CONTRACT DARKWATER TO WORK FOR THE EARTH PROTECTION FORCE BECAUSE, AS MERCENARIES, YOU STAKE YOUR REPUTATION ON BEING THE BEST OF THE BEST.
NO—I HIRED YOU BECAUSE I FULLY VETTED YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION FIRST IN ORDER TO CONFIRM THAT YOUR CLAIM WAS NOT MERE BRAGGADOCIO.
IT WAS NO DIFFERENT WHEN I SOUGHT OUT DR. SHEVLIN.
I ALWAYS MAKE IT A POINT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'M GETTING.

THEN YOU AND I HAVE A LOT IN COMMON, SIR, BECAUSE I ALWAYS MAKE IT A POINT OF KNOWING EXACTLY WHAT I'M GETTING INTO.
SO I DID A LITTLE HOMEWORK MYSELF BEFORE I SIGNED YOUR CONTRACT AND I LEARNED A LOT ABOUT THE EPF AND, ESPECIALLY, YOU—NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THAT THE EPF WAS FOUNDED BY YOUR FATHER.
YES, THAT'S CORRECT. MY FATHER WAS A RANKING CIA MAN WITH ACCESS TO HIGHLY CLASSIFIED INTELLIGENCE DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR.
HE UNDERSTOOD EARLY ON THAT HUMANITY FACED AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT FROM MONSTERS—BOTH TERRESTRIAL AND EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL—THAT MADE OUR PETTY TERRITORIAL SQUABBLES PALE IN COMPARISON.


HE WORKED DILIGENTLY TO ENSURE THE EPF WAS FORMED, DESPITE THE FACT THAT MANY AROUND HIM BELIEVED HIS VISION TO BE THE STUFF OF PARANOID FANTASY.
NO LONGER.
HIS CONCERNS HAVE PROVEN WARRANTED, AND NOW IT IS MY DUTY, AS HIS CHOSEN SUCCESSOR, TO SEE HIS VISION THROUGH, NO MATTER THE COST.
WHICH MAKES ME WONDER, AGENT BISHOP—EXACTLY HOW MUCH OF THIS IS PROFESSIONAL FOR YOU...


"... AND HOW MUCH IS *PERSONAL?*'
MY SON?
HELLO, FATHER.
MY GUARDS INFORMED ME YOU WERE HERE. IS ANYTHING *WRONG*, LEONARDO?
I... I DIDN'T KNOW *WHERE ELSE* TO GO.
OH. HI, JENNY.
HELLO, LEO. IT'S *GOOD* TO SEE YOU.
JENNIKA, PLEASE ALLOW LEONARDO AND MYSELF SOME TIME *ALONE*
INFORM THE GUARDS THAT ALL IS WELL.
HAI, MASTER SPLINTER.
HOW'S SHE DOING?
JENNIKA? SHE IS YOUNG, BUT SHE WILL MAKE A *FINE CHUNIN* IN TIME.
JUST AS *YOU* DID, LEONARDO.
I HONESTLY *DON'T KNOW* ABOUT THAT ANYMORE, FATHER.
HM. TROUBLE WITH YOUR BROTHERS?


IT'S JUST—THERE'S SO MANY BAD THINGS GOING ON AND ALL THEY WANNA DO IS ARGUE WITH EACH OTHER AND GOOF AROUND!
I TRY TO GET THEM TO FOCUS, TO TAKE ALL THIS STUFF SERIOUSLY, AND THEY JUST BLOW ME OFF AT EVERY TURN
RAPH WANTS TO HUNKER DOWN, MIKEY WANTS TO BE A SUPERHERO, AND DONNIE'S GOT HIS HEAD BURIED IN HIS GADGETS 24/7.
THEY'RE MAKING ME CRAZY!
IT... IT'S NOT FUNNY, FATHER!
I AM NOT LAUGHING, MY SON.
BUT YOU'RE GRINNING!
YES, YES, I AM DOING THAT.
FORGIVE ME, LEONARDO—MY AMUSEMENT IS NOT MEANT TO BE INSENSITIVE.
I AM JUST HAPPY TO KNOW THAT MY TEENAGED BOYS ARE STILL TEENAGED BOYS, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE AWAY FROM ME.
MORE LIKE TEENAGED PAINS IN THE BUTT.
JUST SO.
I JUST... I JUST FEEL SO LOST, FATHER.
I UNDERSTAND, MY SON. AND I SUSPECT YOUR BROTHERS, TOO, FEEL VERY MUCH THE SAME AS YOU, EVEN IF THEY DON'T APPEAR TO.
AS THE ELDEST, YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MORE TRANSPARENT IN THAT REGARD. IT IS PART OF WHAT MAKES YOU A CAPABLE LEADER.
BUT... HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO LEAD THEM IF THEY DON'T WANT TO BE LED?
THE WAY YOU ALWAYS HAVE, LEONARDO—WITH LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING, WITH PATIENCE AND TRUST.
YOU WERE A FINE CHUNIN FOR THE FOOT CLAN, MY SON, AND I KNOW IN TIME YOU WILL MAKE A FINE MASTER FOR CLAN HAMATO AS WELL.
I HOPE SO, SENSEI. BECAUSE RIGHT NOW...

"...IT SEEMS LIKE WE'RE RUNNING *OUT* OF TIME."
HEY, WHO'S GOT THE *TABASCO* SAUCE?
HUSH, PETE! MY FAVORITE PART OF THE *MOVIE'S* COMING UP—WHEN THEY GO TO *PREHISTORIC FOREST.*
I HAVE TO DISAGREE, SALLY! "FAT GUY IN A LITTLE COAT" IS THE BEST SCENE BY FAR!
TOTALLY, DUDE! THAT PART *ALWAYS* CRACKS ME UP!
COO!
JIMMY? WHAT'RE YOU *DOIN'* HERE, CUZ?
KNOCK KNOCK
GET THAT, *WILLYA,* MONDO? IT'S GOTTA BE THE PIZZA GUY.
'BOUT STINK N' *TIME,* TOO.
ON IT, BOSS-CAT!
POOR LITTLE GUY. WHAT *HAPPENED* TO YOU?
COO COO COO COO
HOLY GUACAMOLE! SLASH MAN!
C'MON *IN,* AM GO!

YO, DUDES AND DUDETTES! LOOK WHO DECIDED TO COME SLUM WITH THE MUTANIMALS.
SLASH, PAL. WHERE'D YOU COME FROM?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOUR COOP GOT BLOWN UP?
COO COO... COO.
AND THEY TOOK SLASH...?
SLASH? YOU OKAY, BUDDY?
YO, IS IT JUST ME..
...OR DO HIS EYES LOOK SUPER FREAKY?
BUT SLASH IS RIGHT OVER-
COO!
GENTLEMEN...
...WE ARE A GO.

KERAK
WHAT THE— OW!
NOT THE TA,—
RIIP
YAAGGGH!
HE'S GONE MAD!
HNFF!
FWAP

WAIT, SLASH, THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU, MY FR END...
.. CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT THIS?
KRAK!
TIME TO... SLEEP THIS OFF... BIG BOY.
SEYMOUR!
WHOA! LOOK OUT!
THUD

STAND DOWN, SOLDIER!
AAHHH!
SMASH
OH NO, OH NO...
THUP

COMMAND, THIS S WINTER...
...CALM THE SAVAGE BEAST, OVER.
CONS DER IT DONE, SERGEANT W.NTER.
OF ALL THE CRAZY OPS, I SWEAR
SECURE THE BJ..DING! MOVE!

I COUNT THREE TANGOS DOWN!
I'VE GOT THREE OVER HERE!
COUNTING THE HUMAN, THAT MAKES SEVEN TOTAL.
INTEL HAD EIGHT.
WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION—
"—WHO'S MISSING?"

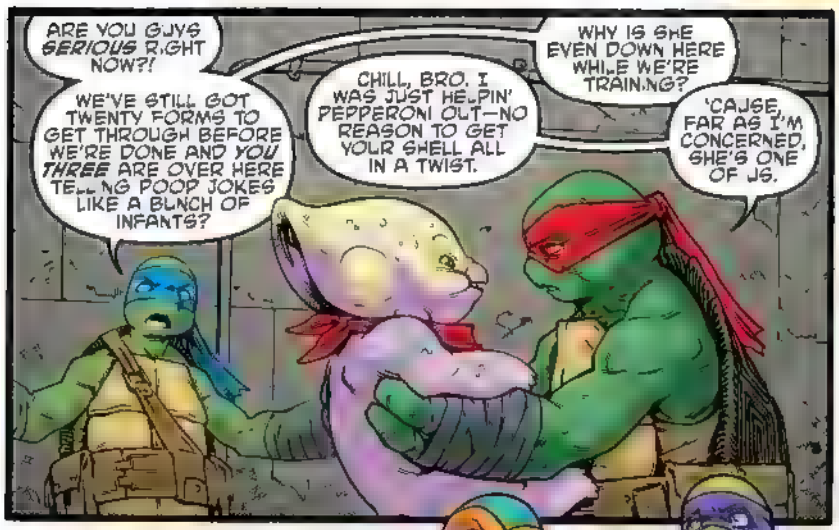
art by KARL MOLINE

ISSUE #88

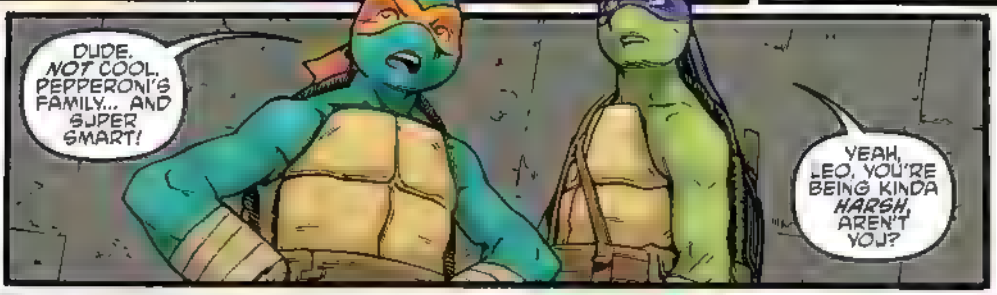
art by MATEUS SANTOLOUCO

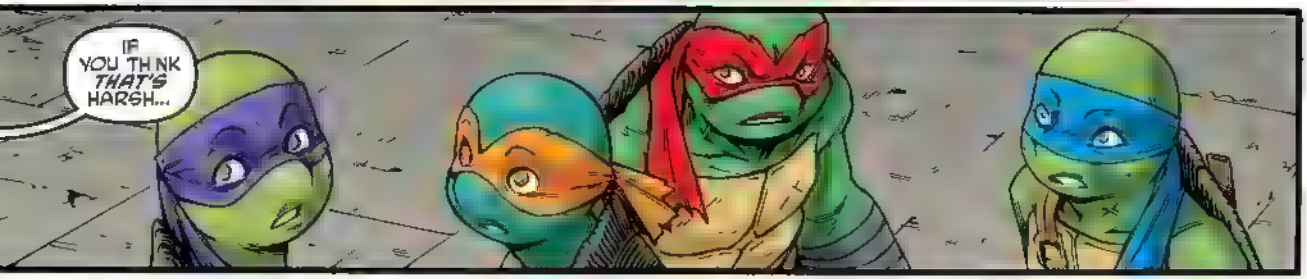
OKAY... WITH ME...
PART HORSE'S MANE.
WHITE CRANE SPREADS WINGS.
BRUSH KNEES TWIST STEP.
UH... HOLD THAT THOUGHT FOR A SEC.
RAPH, WHAT TH—
DANGIT, GIRL!
HOW MANY TIMES I GOTTA TE... YOU THAT AIN'T A TUB?

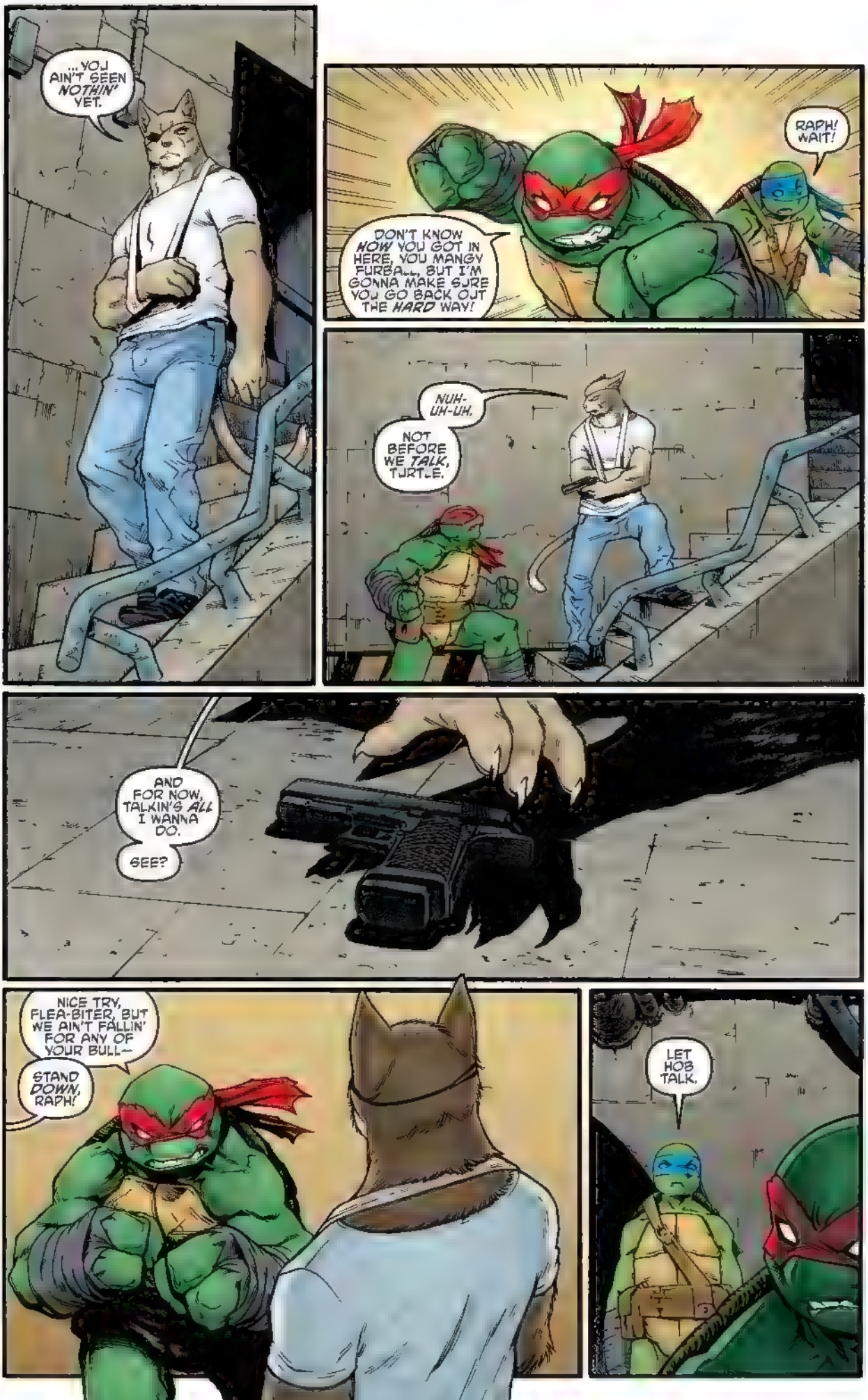
AW, PEPPERONI, YOU REEK.
NOW I'M GONNA HAFTA GIVE YOJ A SECOND BATH.
ACTUALLY, IT'LL BE HER THIRD, RAPH, 'CAJSE SHE ALREADY TOOK A NUMBER TWO BATH.
HA! NUMBER TWO... GET IT?
MIKEY, I SWEAR, IN THE LAND OF BAD PUNS, YOURS WOULD BE ROYALTY.
YES! I AM THE KING!
:GROAN:


ARE YOU GJYS SERIOUS R.GHT NOW?!
WE'VE STILL GOT TWENTY FORMS TO GET THROUGH BEFORE WE'RE DONE AND YOU THREE ARE OVER HERE TE.. NG POOP JOKES LIKE A BUNCH OF INFANTS?
CHILL, BRO. I WAS JUST HE.PIN' PEPPERONI OUT—NO REASON TO GET YOUR SHELL ALL IN A TWIST.
WHY IS SHE EVEN DOWN HERE WHI.E WE'RE TRAIN.NG?
'CAJSE, FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, SHE'S ONE OF JS.

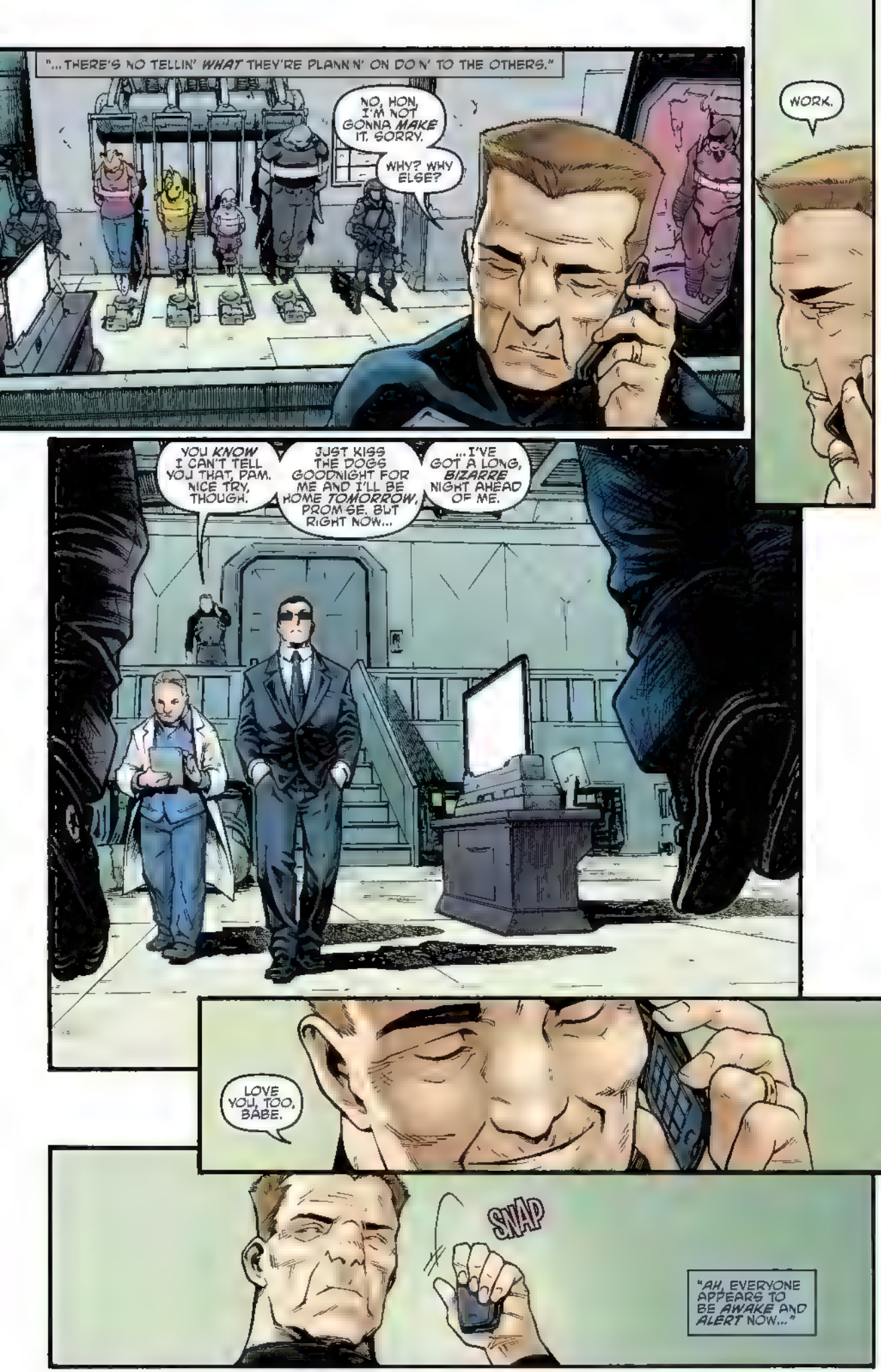
MATTER OF FACT, THE ONLY D FFERENCE I SEE BETWEEN PEP AND US IS THAT SHE AIN'T STUP D ENOUGH TO STAND AROUND ACTIN' LIKE A STINKIN' ONE-LEGGED CRANE AL. DAY LONG.
C'MON... GET REAL, RAPH. SHE'S JUST A DUMB PET.


DUDE. NOT COOL. PEPPERONI'S FAMILY... AND SUPER SMART!
YEAH, LEO, YOU'RE BEING KINDA HARSH, AREN'T YOJ?


IF YOU TH NK THAT'S HARSH...


...YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET.
RAPH! WAIT!
DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT IN HERE, YOU MANGY FURBALL, BUT I'M GONNA MAKE SURE YOU GO BACK OUT THE HARD WAY!
NUH-UH-UH.
NOT BEFORE WE TALK, TURTLE.
AND FOR NOW, TALKIN'S ALL I WANNA DO.
SEE?
NICE TRY, FLEA-BITER, BUT WE AIN'T FALLIN' FOR ANY OF YOUR BULL—
STAND DOWN, RAPH!
LET HOB TALK.

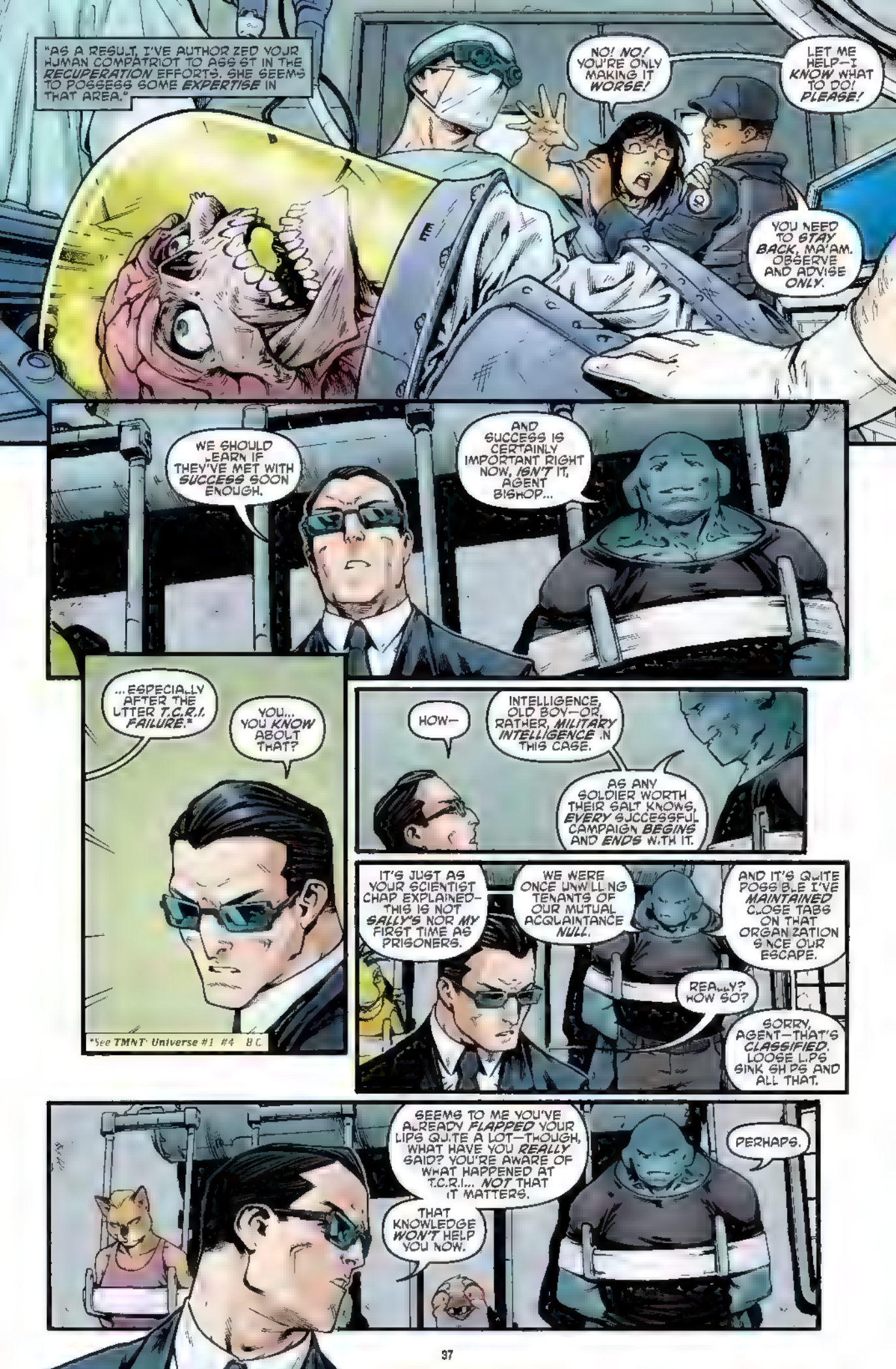
KNEW I COULD COUNT ON THE BOY SCOUT TO KEEP THE BLOWHARD IN CHECK.
ONLY THING KEEP'N' ME IN CHECK IS DECIDIN' WHAT METHOD I'M GONNA USE TO STOMP YOU, HOB.
Y'KNOW, IT'S REAL CUTE HOW YOU KEEP TELLIN' YOURSELF THAT.
ALMOST AS CUTE AS THIS LITTLE GUY.
THROW IN SOME PUKE-GREEN SKIN AND THERE'D BE FIVE OF YOU SLIMY REPTILES I COULDN'T TELL APART.
ENOUGH, HOB. I GAVE YOU THE CHANCE TO TALK, SO TALK. WHY ARE YOU HERE?
AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR ARM?
AND WHERE ARE THE OTHER MUTANIMALS? THEY OKAY?
GOOD QUESTIONS, 'CAUSE IT'S MY ARM AND THE OTHER MUTANIMALS NOT BEIN' OKAY THAT'S GOT ME HERE.
THE GOVERNMENT'S DECLARED THIS MUTANT HUNTIN' SEASON, BOYS, AND THE JARHEADS ARE OUT FOR BLOOD.
JARHEADS?
SOLDIERS, COMMANDOS... WHATEVER YOU WANNA CALL 'EM. SAME HUMAN STINK EITHER WAY.
BUNCH OF 'EM ATTACKED OUR HQ USIN' SLASH AS SOME KIND OF ZOMBIE BATTLE TANK. POOR GUY WAS OUTTA CONTROL—OR MAYBE UNDER CONTROL'S MORE LIKE IT.
TORE THROUGH US LIKE NOTHIN'.
I BARELY ESCAPED BEFORE THEY BAGGED THE OTHERS.
SOLDIERS?
DO YOU THINK...?
DAMN.
HUH. LOOKS LIKE YOU ALREADY RAN INTO THE NIMRODS I'M TALKIN' BOUT. GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED—YOU TURTLES ARE LIKE FREAKIN' TROUBLE MAGNETS.
WELL, IF YOU KNOW 'BOUT THESE PINHEAD GRUNTS, THEN YOU KNOW WE GOTTA DO SOMETHIN' QUICK. 'CAUSE IF THEY CAN BRAINWASH SLASH LIKE THAT...


"...THERE'S NO TELLIN' WHAT THEY'RE PLANN'N' ON DO'N' TO THE OTHERS."
NO, HON, I'M NOT GONNA MAKE IT. SORRY.
WHY? WHY ELSE?
WORK.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T TELL YOU THAT, PAM. NICE TRY, THOUGH.
JUST KISS THE DOGS GOODNIGHT FOR ME AND I'LL BE HOME TOMORROW, PROMISE. BUT RIGHT NOW...
...I'VE GOT A LONG, BIZARRE NIGHT AHEAD OF ME.
LOVE YOU, TOO, BABE.
SNAP
"AH, EVERYONE APPEARS TO BE AWAKE AND ALERT NOW..."

...I TRUST THEY'VE ALL BEEN *SATISFACTORY PATIENTS*, DR. SHEVLIN?
UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, *QUITE* SATISFACTORY, AGENT BISHOP.
YOU CAN *STICK* YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE.
NOW, NOW... LET'S BE *NICE* TO THE GOOD DOCTOR, SHALL WE?
I WASN'T TALKING TO THE *DOCTOR*, SHADES.
YES, WELL, SPEAKING OF "WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE," IT APPEARS OUR GECKO FRIEND HERE IS *REGAINING* THE TAIL IT LOST DURING THE EXTRACTION OPERATION.
DUDE! WATCH THE COLD HANDS!
YES, SIR. THE SUBJECT'S MUTATION DOESN'T SEEM TO *IMPEDE* ITS NATURAL SPONTANEOUS EPIMORPHIC REGENERATIVE PROGRAM.
THE APPENDAGE SHOULD *RETURN* TO A FUNCTIONALLY AND MORPHOLOGICALLY SIMILAR STRUCTURE AS BEFORE.
GUESS THAT'S A FANCY WAY OF SAYING IT'LL *GROW BACK, HUH?*
JUST LIKE "EXTRACTION OPERATION" MUST BE A *NEW WAY* OF SAYING "GUTLESS AMBUSH."
HUMANS— BIG WORDS, NO SPINES.

UNFORTUNATELY, REGENERATION *WASN'T* THE CASE FOR THE CRUSTACEAN.
HOW GOES *ITS* REPAIRS?
LET'S SEE... *AH*, YES, THE SURGICAL TECHS ARE REPORTING *EXCELLENT* PROGRESS, SIR—
"—THE *CLAW MODS* SHOULD BE COMPLETED IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS."
THAT *IS* EXCELLENT.
AND THE MODIFICATIONS FOR *THESE* FOUR?
THEIR NEURAL NODES ARE BEING CALIBRATED AS WE SPEAK.
THE FELINE AND THE MANTA RAY POSSESS *SIMILAR* PTSD CHARACTERISTICS TO THE SNAPPING TURTLE, SO VERY *LITTLE* MODIFICATION IS REQUIRED FOR THEIRS.
HOWEVER, THE GECKO APPEARS TO HAVE EXPERIENCED NO *DELIBERATE* CEREBRAL TRAUMA IN ITS PAST, SO WE'RE ADJUSTING HIS NODES FOR *THAT* VARIABLE.
AND THE PIGEON?
HI! I'M PETE!
UM, WE... WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO PINPOINT *ANY* SIGNIFICANT CEREBRAL ACTIVITY IN THE PIGEON—
-TRAUMA-BASED OR OTHERWISE.
...WE'RE *STILL* LOOKING, SIR.
I SEE.
DO YOU, AGENT?
DO YOU *TRULY* SEE, OR HAVE YOUR EYES BEEN *FOOLED* BY YOUR BLINDING FEAR?

AH, IT SPEAKS.
YES, WHEN "IT" HAS SOMETHING WORTHWHILE TO SAY.
AND SO ELOQUENTLY, NO LESS.
UH, YES, SIR. THIS ONE TESTED QUITE HIGH ON INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT TESTS.
A GENIUS MUTANT, THEN?
I DON'T KNOW IF GENIUS IS AN APT DESIGNATION, BUT I REALLY DON'T NEED TO BE ONE TO COMPREHEND WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.
MODIFYING AND WEAPONIZING LIVING ORGANISMS AGAINST THEIR WILL, AGENT?
I'M SORRY, BUT THE ETHICS OF THAT SEEM TO ESCAPE ME.
AS SHOULD BE THE CASE, I'M AFRAID THIS IS ABOUT ELIMINATING AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO THE HUMAN SPECIES ON THIS PLANET, AFTER ALL... ABOUT SURVIVAL.
SO-CALLED ETHICS TEND TO BE A DETRIMENT TO THAT PARTICULAR PURSUIT.
AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT?
YOU MEAN FROM THE HARMLESS MUTANTS YOU HAVE SHACKLED TO THE WALL?
SHACKLED AND HARMLESS FOR NOW, YES— BUT NO LESS DANGEROUS.
I'VE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE KIND OF CHAOS AND DESTRUCTION YOUR KIND IS CAPABLE OF WHEN LEFT TO ROAM FREELY.
THAT'S FUNNY, 'CAUSE I'M NOT SURE I EVER MET A MUTANT WHO KNOWS WHAT ROAMING FREELY MEANS.
WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT OF "OUR KIND," I OVERHEARD WHAT YOUR SURGEONS ARE INFLICTING ON POOR HERMAN, BUT WHERE ARE LINDSEY AND SEYMOUR?
THE HUMAN TRAITOR AND THE MONSTROSITY?
IT SEEMS I UNDERESTIMATED THE DESTRUCTIVE POWERS OF THE SLASH CREATURE WHEN I WAS CONTROLLING IT—
"—THE LUMBERING BEAST PACKS QUITE A WALLOP. I... IT NEARLY KILLED THE SEYMOUR MONSTROSITY WITH A SINGLE ATTACK."


"AS A RESULT, I'VE AUTHORIZED YOUR HUMAN COMPATRIOT TO ASSIST IN THE *RECUPERATION* EFFORTS. SHE SEEMS TO POSSESS SOME *EXPERTISE* IN THAT AREA."
NO! NO! YOU'RE ONLY MAKING IT *WORSE!*
LET ME HELP—I *KNOW* WHAT TO DO! *PLEASE!*
YOU NEED TO *STAY BACK*, MA'AM. OBSERVE AND ADVISE *ONLY.*
WE SHOULD LEARN IF THEY'VE MET WITH *SUCCESS* SOON ENOUGH.
AND SUCCESS IS CERTAINLY IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW, *ISN'T IT*, AGENT BISHOP...
...ESPECIALLY AFTER THE LITTER *T.C.R.I. FAILURE.**
YOU... YOU *KNOW* ABOUT THAT?
*See TMNT: Universe #1 #4 B.C.
HOW—
INTELLIGENCE, OLD BOY—OR, RATHER, *MILITARY INTELLIGENCE* IN THIS CASE.
AS ANY SOLDIER WORTH THEIR SALT KNOWS, *EVERY* SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN *BEGINS* AND *ENDS* WITH IT.
IT'S JUST AS YOUR SCIENTIST CHAP EXPLAINED—THIS IS NOT *SALLY'S* NOR *MY* FIRST TIME AS PRISONERS.
WE WERE ONCE UNWILLING TENANTS OF OUR MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE *NULL.*
AND IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE I'VE *MAINTAINED* CLOSE TABS ON THAT ORGANIZATION SINCE OUR ESCAPE.
REALLY? HOW SO?
SORRY, AGENT—THAT'S *CLASSIFIED.* LOOSE LIPS SINK SHIPS AND ALL THAT.
SEEMS TO ME YOU'VE ALREADY *FLAPPED* YOUR LIPS QUITE A LOT—THOUGH, WHAT HAVE YOU *REALLY* SAID? YOU'RE AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENED AT T.C.R.I... *NOT* THAT IT MATTERS.
THAT KNOWLEDGE *WON'T* HELP YOU NOW.
PERHAPS.

THEN AGAIN, I HAVEN'T DIVULGED ALL I KNOW ABOUT THE EARTH PROTECTION FORCE, YOUR DARK WATER LACKEYS...
...OR ABOUT YOU.
ME? WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY KNOW ABOUT ME, MONSTER?
LET'S JUST SAY...
SHWP
...MORE THAN YOU KNOW ABOUT ME!
SHWP
GYAHH!
HRGK!
SHNK
SHNK
STINGRAY BARBS. BUT... HOW?
MUTATIONS WITHIN MUTATIONS...
FASCINATING.

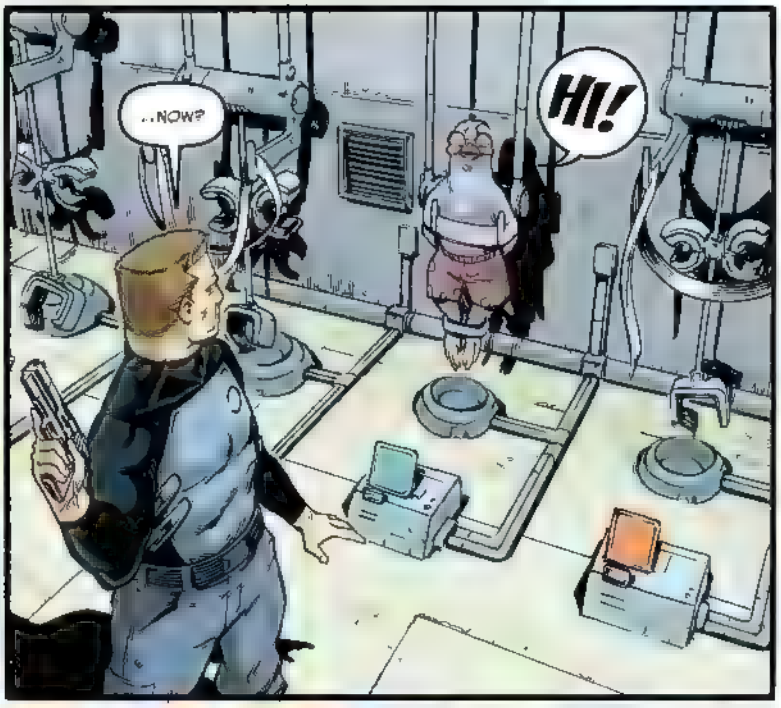
GRRK?!
OH... FOR CRYING OUT LOUD.
ALL DELTA WHISKEY, THIS IS KNIGHT! LAB ONE IS COMPROMISED!
WE HAVE ONE HOSTILE LOOSE! REPEAT...
"... A HOSTILE IS LOOSE!"
WHAT IS THE SAYING, AGENT? THIS ISN'T MY FIRST RODEO?
SURELY AFTER ALL MY PRISON EXPERIENCE, YOU REALLY DIDN'T BELIEVE YOUR PALTRY BONDS COULD HOLD ME, DID YOU?
GLLRKK...
HELP! IT'S KILLING HIM!
HARDLY...

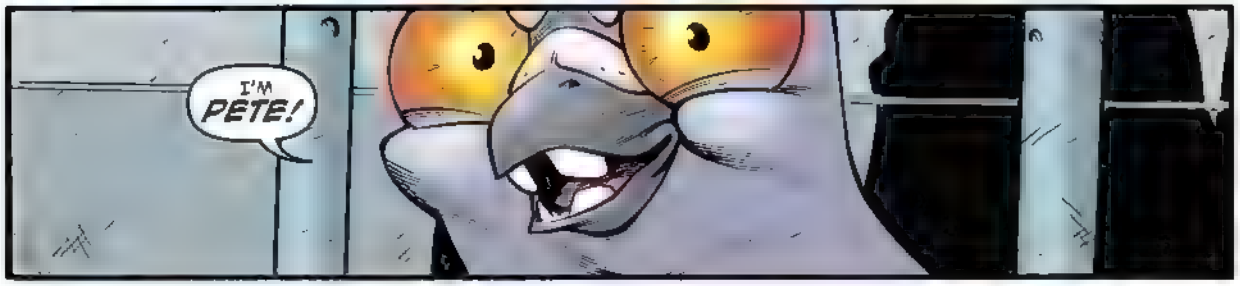
KRAK
YAGH!
WHOP
NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH HIDDEN POWERS, ARE YOU, MUTANT?
IT APPEARS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ME AS WELL AS YOU BELIEVED.
COME. LET ME TEACH YOU MORE.
RAHH!
YOU CALL YOURSELF A SOLDIER.
SO YOU ADMIT WE'RE AT WAR?
FWUD
YOUR KIND AND MINE?
UNF!

A SOLDIER, YES.
BUT NOT BY CHOICE.
BY NECESSITY!
THUD
TO FIGHT IN A WAR OF TERROR WROUGHT BY THOSE WHO LET FEAR AND IGNORANCE DICTATE THEIR VIOLENT ACTIONS.
CHAK
TO VIGOROUSLY DEFEND MY KIND AGAINST A MONSTROUS EX STENTIA... THREAT.
YOUR KIND.
PUT THE NICE AGENT DOWN AND TURN AROUND SLOWLY, MUTANT...

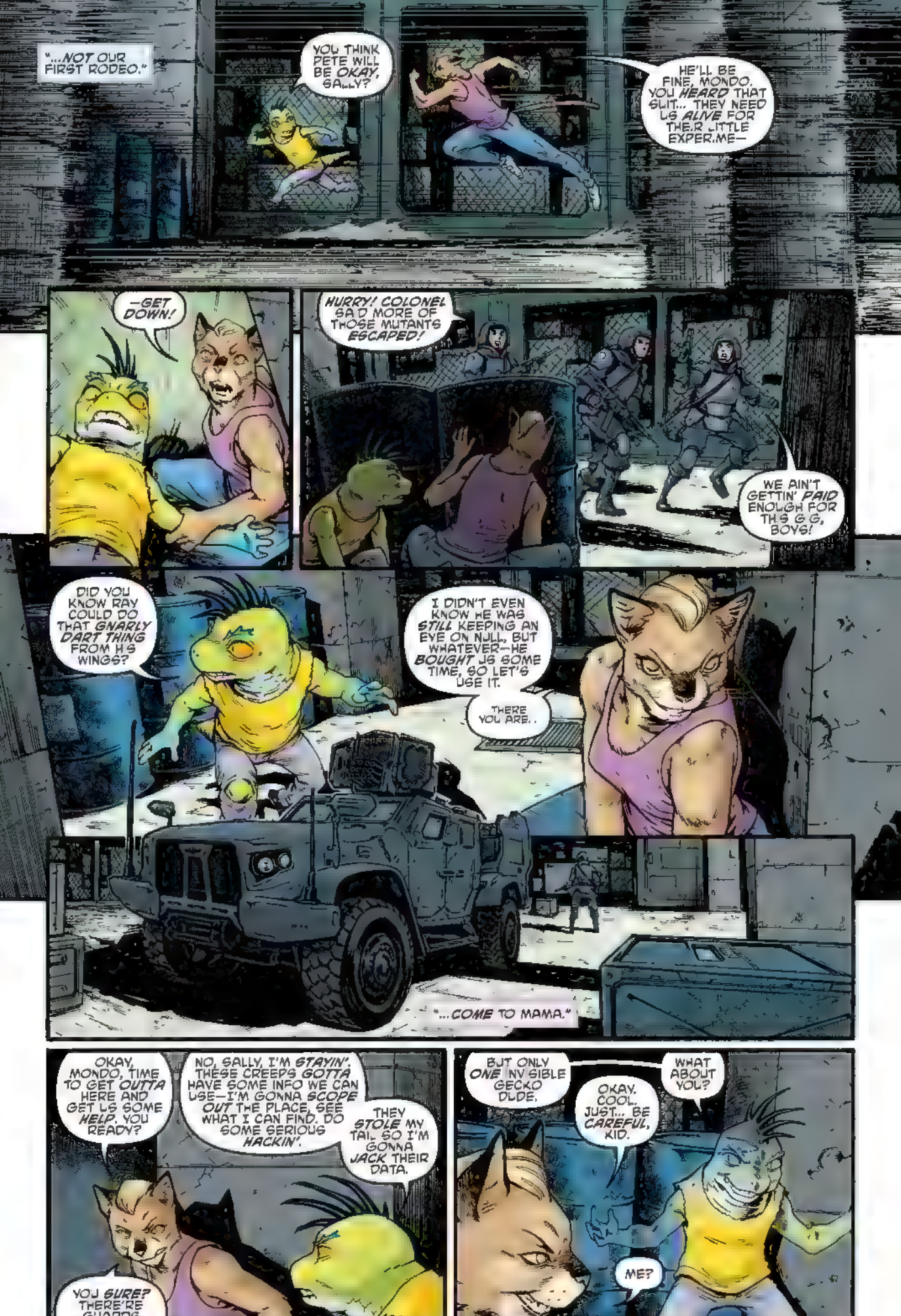
...AND KEEP THOSE BACK-FLAPS... OR WINGS... OR WHATEVER THE HELL THEY ARE WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM.

UM, COLONEL KNIGHT... WE'VE GOT ANOTHER PROBLEM, SIR.
OH, WHAT THE HELL...


...NOW?
HI!


I'M PETE!

LIKE I SAID...


"...NOT OUR FIRST RODEO."
YOU THINK PETE WILL BE OKAY, SALLY?
HE'LL BE FINE, MONDO. YOU HEARD THAT SLIT... THEY NEED US ALIVE FOR THEIR LITTLE EXPERIME—
—GET DOWN!
HURRY! COLONEL SAID MORE OF THOSE MUTANTS ESCAPED!
WE AIN'T GETTIN' PAID ENOUGH FOR THIS GIG, BOYS!
DID YOU KNOW RAY COULD DO THAT GNARLY DART THING FROM HIS WINGS?
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE WAS STILL KEEPING AN EYE ON NULL, BUT WHATEVER—HE BOUGHT US SOME TIME, SO LET'S USE IT.
THERE YOU ARE..
"...COME TO MAMA."
OKAY, MONDO, TIME TO GET OUTTA HERE AND GET US SOME HELP. YOU READY?
NO, SALLY, I'M STAYIN'. THESE CREEPS GOTTA HAVE SOME INFO WE CAN USE—I'M GONNA SCOPE OUT THE PLACE, SEE WHAT I CAN FIND, DO SOME SERIOUS HACKIN'.
THEY STOLE MY TAIL, SO I'M GONNA JACK THEIR DATA.
YOU SURE? THERE'RE GUARDS EVERYWHERE.
BUT ONLY ONE INVISIBLE GECKO DUDE.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
OKAY. COOL. JUST... BE CAREFUL, KID.
ME?

"I'M GOING FOR A JOYRIDE."
CLONK
YES!
PUSHBUTTON IGNITIONS RULE!
VRRRMMM
BRRRT BRRRT
WHAT THE—?!
FIRE!
BLAM BLAM
PNG
PNK
PNG
HEH. BULLETPROOF GLASS.
VRRRMMM
NICE!
SSSHH
"THIS IS SOME PRETTY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE..."

...I'M PICKING UP PLENTY OF BLOOD TRACE, BUT NO BULLET CASINGS.
THIS WAS ALL DEFINITELY CAUSED BY BLUNT FORCE DESTRUCTION.
YEAH— BERSERKER, BRAINWASHED SLASH. I ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT, GENIUS.
YES, YOU DID, HOB. BUT WE HAD TO MAKE SURE.
MAKE SURE?! WE'RE WASTIN' ALL THIS TIME SO YOU IDIOTS CAN BE SURE?
WHY WOULD I MAKE SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT UP?!
'CAUSE LYIN'S WHAT YOU DO BEST, FLEABAG.
POOR SLASH. THERE'S NO WAY THE BIG GUY WOULDA DONE THIS TO THE OTHER MUTANIMALS ON HIS OWN.
NO KIDDIN', RUNT...
...JUST LIKE THERE'S NO WAY HE EVER WOULDA BEEN ON HIS OWN FOR THEM TO MESS WITH HIS HEAD IF YOU HADN'T COME ALONG AND RUN HIM OFF FROM THE REST OF US.*
HEY!
SWIPE
*See TMNT #54 - B.C.
YO—YOU COME AT MY LITTLE BRO LIKE THAT AGAIN, IT'LL BE THE LAST TIME.
YEAH, YEAH... CUTE AS EVER.
SO, WHAT ABOUT IT, BOY SCOUT...
...YOU GOT A PLAN IN THE WORKS, OR YOU USELESS WITHOUT THAT SLIMY RAT HOLDIN' YOUR HAND ALL THE TIME?
JUST... JUST GIVE ME A SEC. I'M THINKING.
WELL, THINK FASTER...

"...'CAUSE WE'RE RUNNIN' OUTTA TIME."
MUCH AS I HATE TO SAY IT, HOB'S RIGHT.
I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYTHING HERE THAT'S GONNA HELP US. WE NEED TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO...
...NEXT.
UH-OH.
CRAP!
KXXZTT

EVERYONE! GET DOWN!
OH, MAN...
...WE'VE GOT COMPANY TO SPARE, GUYS.
IS IT THOSE DARK WATER DUDES?
YEAH— PRETTY SURE, MIKE.
DAMMIT! I SHOULD'VE KNOWN THEY'D BE MONITORING THIS PLACE.
YEAH, YOU SHOULDA.
SHUT UP, HOB.
SO WHAT ABOUT T, LEO? IT'S LOOKIN' LIKE SERIOUS ALAMO TIME, BRO...
...WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO?
I... I...

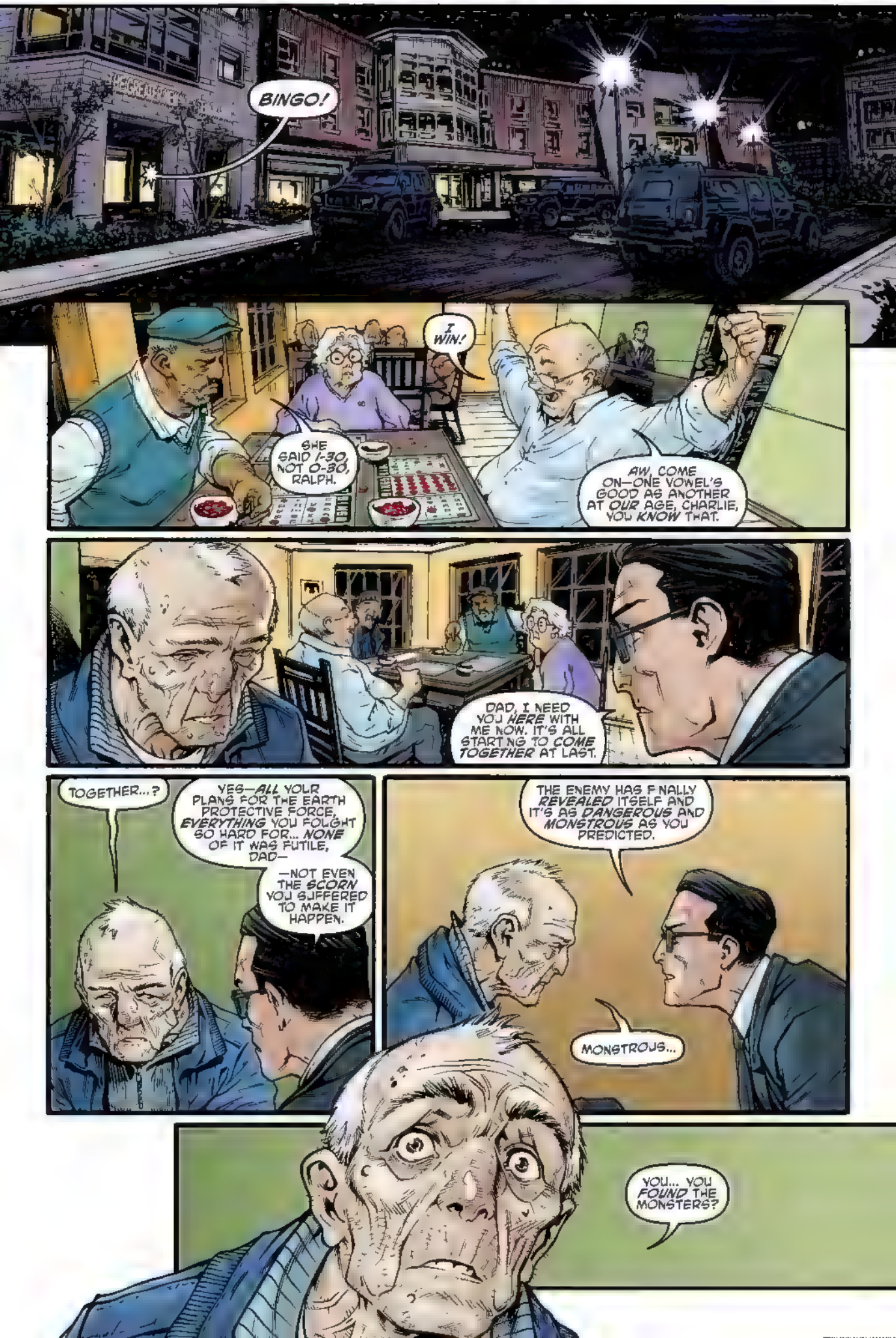
"...DON'T KNOW."
COMMAND, THIS IS WINTER. WE'VE GOT THE TANGOS *BOXED IN*. ORDERS? OVER.
WINTER, KNIGHT HERE. SECURE AND MAINTAIN PERIMETER, BUT *DO NOT* ENGAGE...
...WE HAD A BIT OF A *SNAFU* HERE. B SHOP IS EN ROUTE. OVER.
UNDERSTOOD, COMMAND.
ANY ETA ON WHEN WE CAN EXPECT *REINFORCEMENTS?* OVER.
SOON...
...WE'RE *PREPPING* THE WEAPON NOW.

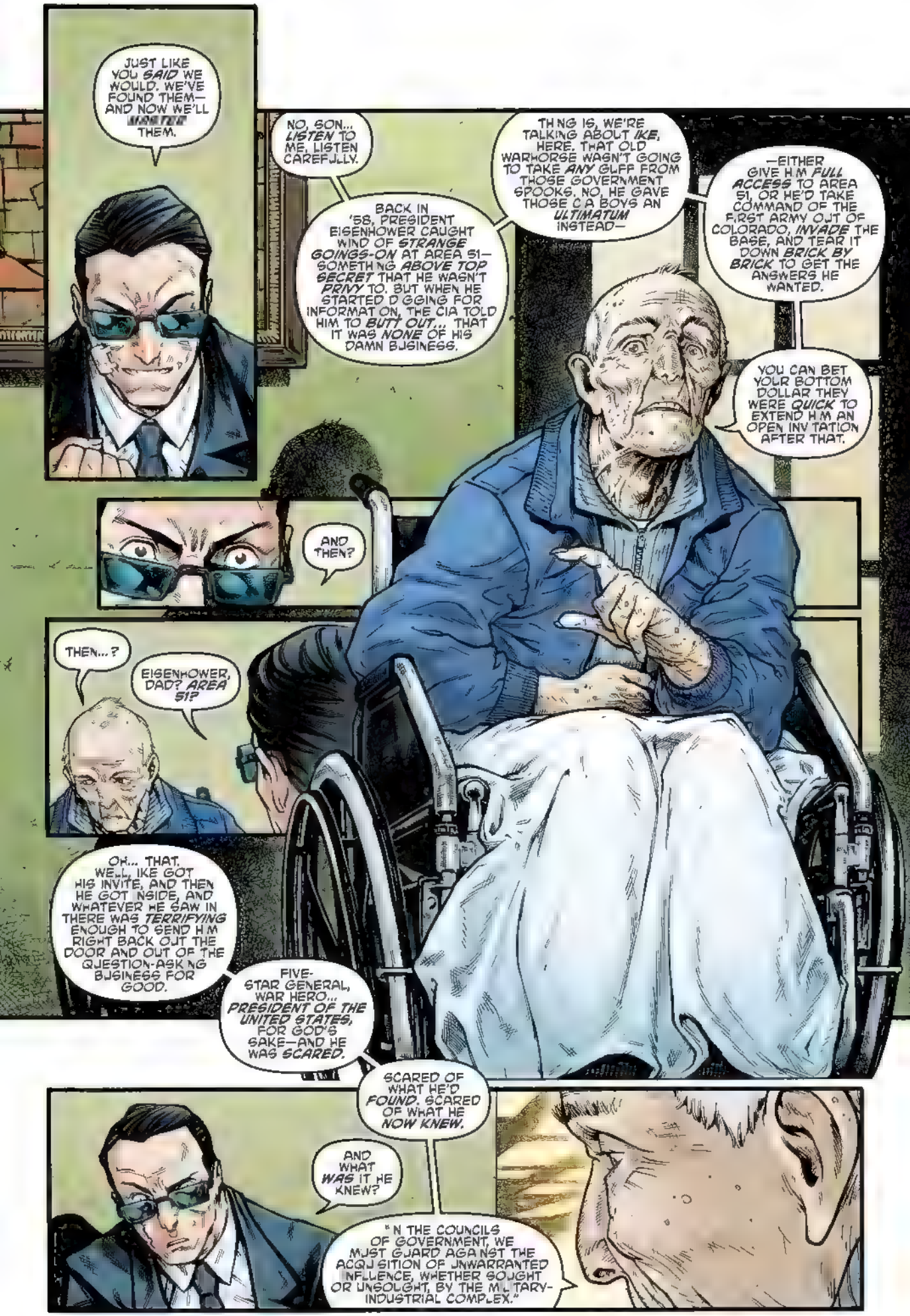
ART BY KEVIN EASTMAN
COLORS BY TONY HARRIS

ATTENTION! FULL SECURITY LOCKDOWN IS IN EFFECT! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!
OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD...
...THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING.
REPEAT— THIS IS NOT A DRILL!
SKREEEK
OKAY, OKAY—NOT A DRILL. IT IS HAPPENING... FINE.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO RUB IT IN.
HELLO? WH-WHO'S THERE?
AGENT BISHOP? COLONEL KNIGHT? IS THAT YOU?
HUH?
YO...
=GULP=

...WHAT UP, DOC?
H-HOW...
MUTANT MAG.C.
HIYAH!
KRAK
AND MUTANT MUSCLE.
OUCH!E.
HATE TO INVADE YOUR PERSONAL SPACE LIKE THIS, DOC, BUT—
EPF
YANK
—YOU BOGUS DUDES STARTED IT.
ALL R GHT, MONDO...
EPF

"...TIME TO ROCK N' ROLL."
EPF
Earth Protection Force
SERVER ROOM D
COMMAND, THIS IS HANSON. SERVER ROOM DELTA IS SECURE, OVER.
COPY THAT, HANSON. CHECK THE LATRINES AND STAIRWELLS NEXT. OVER.
ROGER THAT. OUT.
BETTER HUSTLE, GECKO DUDE...
...'FORE THEY FIND THE DOC'S SECRET NAPPY PLACE.
SWISH
OKAY, BABY, DON'T LET ME DOWN.
chk
BINGO.
SECURE ACCESS AUTHORIZED


BINGO!
I WIN!
SHE SAID I-30, NOT O-30, RALPH.
AW, COME ON—ONE VOWEL'S GOOD AS ANOTHER AT OUR AGE, CHARLIE, YOU KNOW THAT.
DAD, I NEED YOU HERE WITH ME NOW. IT'S ALL STARTING TO COME TOGETHER AT LAST.
TOGETHER...?
YES—ALL YOUR PLANS FOR THE EARTH PROTECTIVE FORCE, EVERYTHING YOU FOUGHT SO HARD FOR... NONE OF IT WAS FUTILE, DAD—
—NOT EVEN THE SCORN YOU SUFFERED TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.
THE ENEMY HAS FINALLY REVEALED ITSELF AND IT'S AS DANGEROUS AND MONSTROUS AS YOU PREDICTED.
MONSTROUS...
YOU... YOU FOUND THE MONSTERS?


JUST LIKE YOU *SAID* WE WOULD. WE'VE FOUND THEM— AND NOW WE'LL *MASTER* THEM.
NO, SON... *LISTEN* TO ME. LISTEN CAREFULLY.
BACK IN '58, PRESIDENT EISENHOWER CAUGHT WIND OF *STRANGE GOINGS-ON* AT AREA 51— SOMETHING *ABOVE TOP SECRET* THAT HE WASN'T *PRIVY* TO. BUT WHEN HE STARTED DIGGING FOR INFORMATION, THE CIA TOLD HIM TO *BUTT OUT*... THAT IT WAS *NONE* OF HIS DAMN BUSINESS.
THE THING IS, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT *IKE*, HERE. THAT OLD WARHORSE WASN'T GOING TO TAKE *ANY* GUFF FROM THOSE GOVERNMENT SPOOKS. NO, HE GAVE THOSE C.I.A. BOYS AN *ULTIMATUM* INSTEAD—
—EITHER GIVE HIM *FULL ACCESS* TO AREA 51, OR HE'D TAKE COMMAND OF THE FIRST ARMY OUT OF COLORADO, *INVADE* THE BASE, AND TEAR IT DOWN *BRICK BY BRICK* TO GET THE ANSWERS HE WANTED.
YOU CAN BET YOUR BOTTOM DOLLAR THEY WERE *QUICK* TO EXTEND HIM AN OPEN INVITATION AFTER THAT.
AND THEN?
THEN...?
EISENHOWER, DAD? *AREA 51?*
OH... THAT. WELL, IKE GOT HIS INVITE, AND THEN HE GOT INSIDE, AND WHATEVER HE SAW IN THERE WAS *TERRIFYING* ENOUGH TO SEND HIM RIGHT BACK OUT THE DOOR AND OUT OF THE QUESTION-ASKING BUSINESS FOR *GOOD.*
FIVE-STAR GENERAL, WAR HERO... *PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,* FOR GOD'S SAKE—AND HE WAS *SCARED.*
SCARED OF WHAT HE'D *FOUND.* SCARED OF WHAT HE *NOW KNEW.*
AND WHAT *WAS* IT HE KNEW?
"IN THE COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT, WE MUST GUARD AGAINST THE ACQUISITION OF UNWARRANTED INFLUENCE, WHETHER SOUGHT OR UNSOUGHT, BY THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX."

THAT OLD TROPE? REALLY, DAD? THAT'S IT?
DON'T YOU FIND IT IRONIC THAT YOUR "WAR HERO" LEFT OFFICE RAILING AGAINST THE VERY THING THAT PROTECTS THIS WORLD AGAINST THE MONSTERS WHO WOULD DESTROY IT?
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, SON. IKE KNEW... KNEW THAT IF WE SURRENDER OURSELVES TO HUNTING MONSTERS, WE RISK BECOMING MONSTERS, TOO.
HE KNEW SOME QUESTIONS ARE JUST BETTER LEFT UNANSWERED. SOME MONSTERS BEST LEFT ALONE.
DAD? DAD... CAN YOU HEAR ME?
I LIKE IKE..
HE'S BEEN DOING THAT QUITE A BIT LATELY...
...SLIPPING IN AND OUT OF LUCIDITY. IT'S NORMAL FOR SOMEONE IN THE LATER STAGES OF HIS CONDITION.
BEST YOU CAN DO IS CHERISH THOSE MOMENTS WHEN HE SEEMS HIMSELF.
HIMSELF? HARDLY. MY FATHER'S "CONDITION" HAS TRANSFORMED HIM INTO A SHELL OF THE COLD WAR HERO HE ONCE WAS, LUCID OR NOT, NURSE STARKS.
PLEASE, JUST ANGIE. AND SPEAKING OF WARS, YOU LOOK LIKE YOU PICKED A FIGHT WITH MIKE TYSON. WHAT HAPPENED?
WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF I TOLD YOU A GIANT TALKING MANTA RAY DID THIS TO ME?
I'D SAY YOU WERE SWIMMING IN SOME DANGEROUS WATERS.
HM. AS ARE WE ALL...
LOOK—I KNOW SEEING YOUR FATHER THIS WAY IS TOUGH, BUT HE'S STILL THE MAN HE ONCE WAS... DEEP INSIDE.
AND WHATEVER GREAT THINGS HE ACCOMPLISHED WHEN HE WAS A YOUNGER MAN WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF HIS LEGACY, MR. BISHOP.
IT'S AGENT BISHOP, NURSE STARKS...
BZZZ... BZZZ
SAMUNG
Darkwater
ACTIVE NOW
WINTER IN DIRECT CONTACT W/MULTIPLE TANGOS
SLASH PREPPED
...AND I AM MY FATHER'S LEGACY.

THIS IS AGENT BISHOP—
—I HAVE TAKEN CONN OF THE WEAPON...

...COMMENCE THE MONSTER HUNT.
DARK WATER--LISTEN UP! STAND BY TO BREACH!
SOMEBODY BETTER COME UP WITH A PLAN QUICK...
...'CAUSE THOSE SOLDIER DUDES ARE GETTIN' ANTSY.
THEY'RE JAMMING US, TOO. I CAN'T GET A SIGNAL.
LIKE 911'S GONNA BE ANY HELP, TURTLE.
WHY DON'T YOU CALL THAT RAT DADDY OF YOURS INSTEAD--TELL HIM TO SEND SOME NINJAS THAT KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOIN'.
THEY AIN'T THE ONLY ONES.
SHUT UP, HOB.
AND GET DOWN, MIKEY! YOU'RE GONNA GET YOURSELF SHOT!
SORRY, BIG BRO. GEEZ. JUST TRYIN' TO HELP.
SPEAKIN' OF SHOOTIN', IT'S TIME TO GET OFFENSIVE, BOYS...
...OLD HOB STYLE.
YEAH. SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT.
WHAT'S THAT, FLEABAG--SOME KINDA SECRET KITTY LITTER BOX?

BUT—
BEFORE YOU START WHININ' LIKE A CRYBABY, I AIN'T PLANNIN' ON *WASTIN'* ANYONE. THIS IS A *NULL STUN GUN*, REMEMBER?*
IT WON'T KILL 'EM, BUT THEY'LL SURE *REGRET* BEIN' ON THE WRONG END OF IT.
AND WHAT EXACTLY *ARE* YOU PLANNING TO DO WITH IT, HOB?
*See TMNT # 53—B.C.
I PLAN TO KNOCK THE CRAP OUTTA THOSE SUCKERS SO WE CAN GET THE HELL *OUTTA* HERE.
HEH. STUPID PLAN.
YEAH, WELL... AT LEAST IT'S A *PLAN*.
OKAY, WAIT...
...HOB'S GOT THE *RIGHT IDEA*.
HE DOES?
I DO?
YEAH. MOSTLY.
A *DIVERSION'S* WHAT WE NEED RIGHT NOW, AND HOB'S GUN WILL GIVE US THAT. BUT ONCE HE SHOOTS, WE CAN'T *ALL* RUN OUT THE FRONT DOOR LIKE CHICKENS WITH OUR HEADS CUT OFF.
WE NEED TO EXFILTRATE FROM THE *SIDE ROOMS*. HOPEFULLY THEY'LL BE TOO BUSY PAYING ATTENTION TO HOB'S CHAOS TO NOTICE US SLIP OUT.
EXFILTRATE?
UH, YEAH... ESCAPE. *DUHHH*.
RIGHT, LIKE YOU *KNEW*, MIKE.
IT MEANS TO *WITHDRAW*. ESCAPE.
OKAY... WE'RE GONNA *SPLIT UP*—MIKEY WITH ME, DONNIE WITH RAPH. IT'S UP TO *YOU* WHICH WAY YOU WANNA EXIT, HOB.
DAMN *RIGHT* IT IS.
BUT FIRST...

...THE CHAOS PART!
NNXT!
GAH!
WHAT THE HELL?!
ZXXYYZ
DARK WATER, STAY FOCUSED! THIS IS ONLY SUPPRESSION FIRE--THE TANGOS ARE MAKING A BREAK FOR IT!
RAPH, WHERE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GO WHEN WE GET AWAY? LEO DIDN'T SAY.
WHO CARES, DON, AS LONG AS IT'S AWAY FROM H--
THERE THEY ARE!
LIGHT 'EM UP!
LASER!
GYAH! MY EYES!

TRANK 'EM!
LOOK OUT!
PING
PANG
OHNK
DON'T MOVE!
WHAAA...
AAAGH!
LUCKY FOR YOU, I CHOSE YOUR SIDE FOR MY EX.T.
UNLUCKY FOR YOU, I ONLY COVER... I DON'T CARRY.
GREAT
C'MON, RAPH, SHAKE IT OFF WE GOTTA MOVE.
SHEESH, DONNIE...

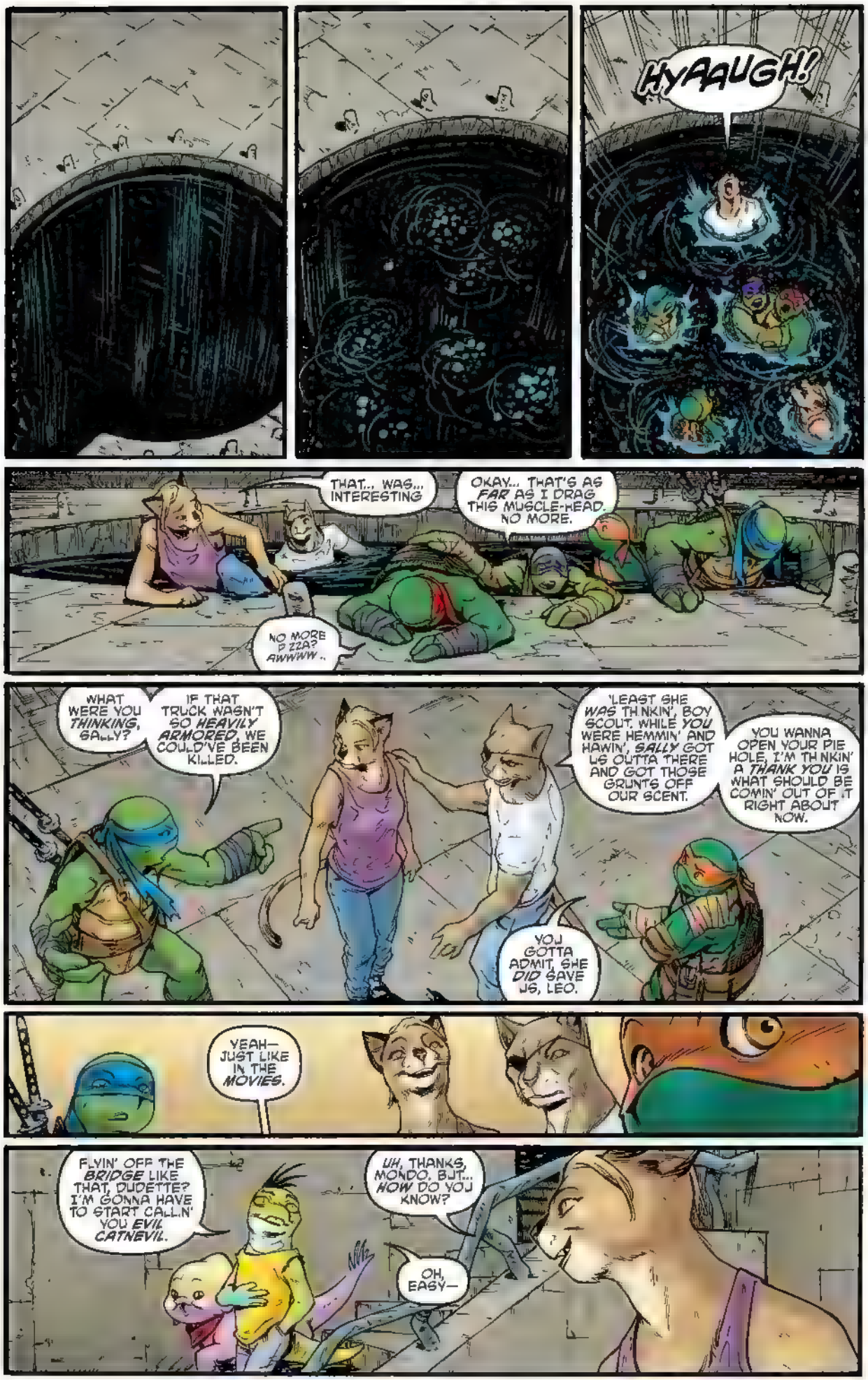
"...WHERE'S THE FIRE?"
LEO, HELP! I'M ON FIRE!
I'M... TRYING... MIKEY...
HIT 'EM NOW—WHILE THEY'RE DOWN!
HRGGK!
KYXXT
WATCH THE FLANKS!
GET DOWN!
FUDT FUDT FUDT
WE'VE GOTTA TAKE OUT THAT ACTIVE DENIAL SYSTEM ON THAT TRUCK- T'S FRYING MY BROTHERS ALIVE!
THEN I GUESS IT'S A GOOD THING I REMEMBERED TO BRING...
...MY NULL GRENADE!
PTING PANG KTING
FWIP

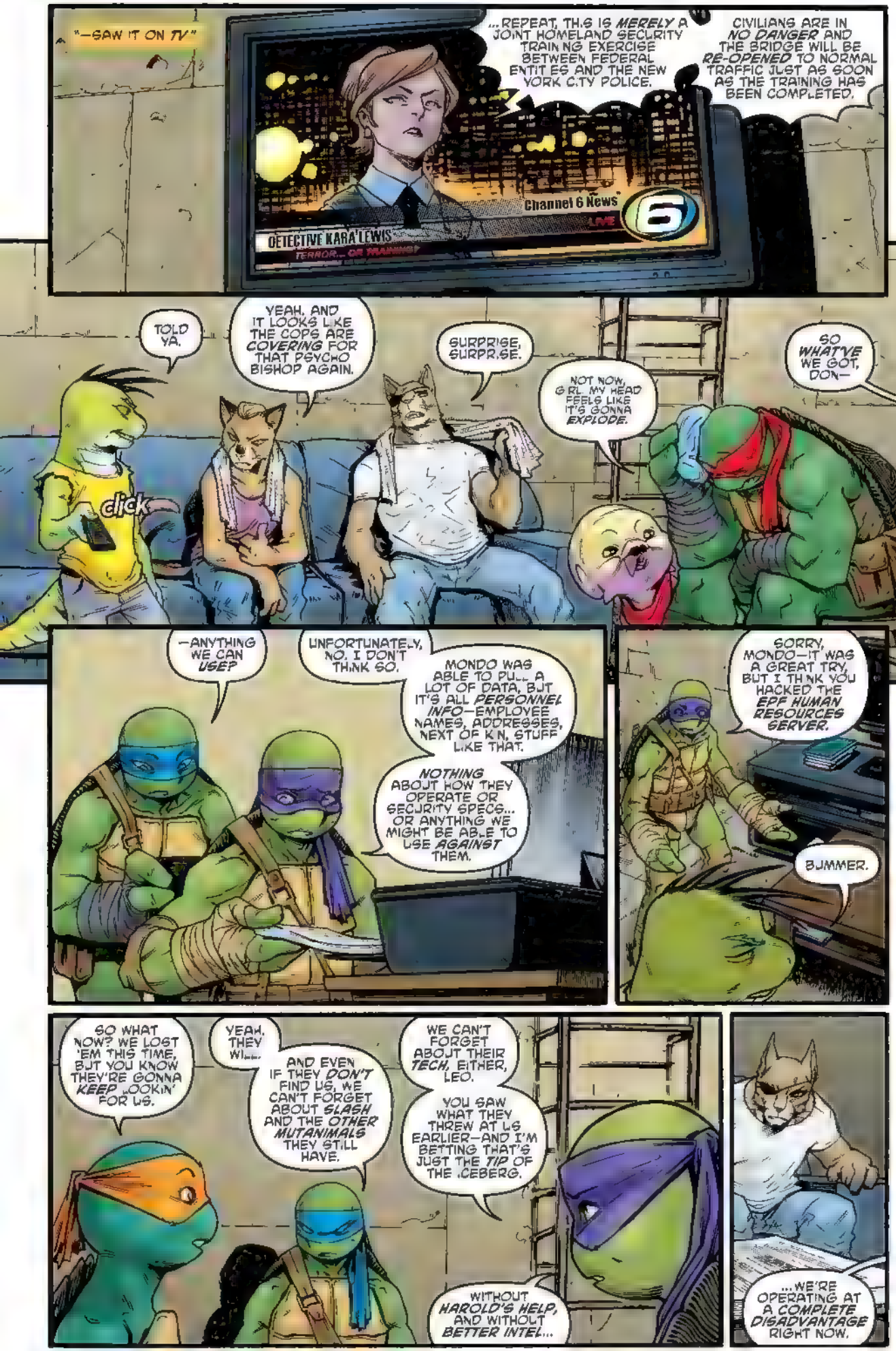
BA-WHUMP!
MICROWAVE'S OUTTA ORDER, BOYS—LET'S GO!
YEAH! AND IF I END UP WITH MELAROPA FROM THAT THING, I'M TOTALLY SUING!
MELANOMA, M'KEY.
THAT, TOO!
BE CAREFUL, GUYS! REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE STREET PHANTOMS!
THEY MIGHT HAVE...
. REINFORCEMENTS.

RAAARR!
SO NOT GOOD.
WHOA, WHOA, BIG GUY... IT'S US, YOUR FRIENDS.
"WRONG, MONSTER..."
...THERE ARE NO FRIENDS HERE.
BWAH!
WHAM
IDIOT! YOU WANT TO GET US ALL KILLED?
I TOLD YOU, SLASH AIN'T HIMSELF RIGHT NOW!
BUT—

FWUP
FWUP
FWUP
#KOFF#
#KOFF#
#KOFF#
HEY... WHO'S SMOKING?
TEAR GAS!
BUT, WHO—
COME WITH ME...
...IF YOU WANT TO LIVE.
GOD, I ALWAYS WANTED TO SAY THAT
GO, SALLY, GO!
RIDE, SALLY, RIDE...
NOOOOO!

FASTER, SALLY! THEY AIN'T GONNA QUIT!
YEAH, YEAH—I KNOW, HOB! I GOT A PLAN!
GOOD. 'CAUSE WE GOT OTHER PROBLEMS BESIDES THOSE JARHEADS.
ALRIGHT, EVERYONE, HOLD ON TIGHT TO SOMETHIN'...
...AND HOLD YOUR BREATH!
KRRSSSH
THIS IS YOUR PLAN?!
I'VE HAD BETTER.
SPLSSSSH


HYAAUGH!
THAT... WAS... INTERESTING
OKAY... THAT'S AS FAR AS I DRAG THIS MUSCLE-HEAD. NO MORE.
NO MORE P ZZA? AWW'WW ..
WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, SALLY?
IF THAT TRUCK WASN'T SO HEAVILY ARMORED, WE COULD'VE BEEN KILLED.
'LEAST SHE WAS TH NKIN', BOY SCOUT. WHILE YOU WERE HEMMIN' AND HAWIN', SALLY GOT US OUTTA THERE AND GOT THOSE GRUNTS OFF OUR SCENT.
YOU WANNA OPEN YOUR PIE HOLE, I'M TH NKIN' A THANK YOU IS WHAT SHOULD BE COMIN' OUT OF IT RIGHT ABOUT NOW.
YOU GOTTA ADMIT, SHE DID SAVE US, LEO.
YEAH— JUST LIKE IN THE MOVIES.
FLYIN' OFF THE BRIDGE LIKE THAT, DUDETTE? I'M GONNA HAVE TO START CALLIN' YOU EVIL CATNEVIL.
UH, THANKS, MONDO. BUT... HOW DO YOU KNOW?
OH, EASY—


"—SAW IT ON TV"
...REPEAT, THIS IS MERELY A JOINT HOMELAND SECURITY TRAINING EXERCISE BETWEEN FEDERAL ENTITIES AND THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE.
CIVILIANS ARE IN NO DANGER AND THE BRIDGE WILL BE RE-OPENED TO NORMAL TRAFFIC JUST AS SOON AS THE TRAINING HAS BEEN COMPLETED.
Channel 6 News
LIVE
DETECTIVE KARA LEWIS
TERROR... OR TRAINING?
TOLD YA.
YEAH, AND IT LOOKS LIKE THE COPS ARE COVERING FOR THAT PSYCHO BISHOP AGAIN.
click
SURPRISE, SURPRISE.
NOT NOW, GIRL. MY HEAD FEELS LIKE IT'S GONNA EXPLODE.
SO WHATVE WE GOT, DON—
—ANYTHING WE CAN USE?
UNFORTUNATELY, NO. I DON'T THINK SO.
MONDO WAS ABLE TO PULL A LOT OF DATA, BUT IT'S ALL PERSONNEL INFO—EMPLOYEE NAMES, ADDRESSES, NEXT OF KIN, STUFF LIKE THAT.
NOTHING ABOUT HOW THEY OPERATE OR SECURITY SPECS... OR ANYTHING WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE AGAINST THEM.
SORRY, MONDO—IT WAS A GREAT TRY, BUT I THINK YOU HACKED THE EPF HUMAN RESOURCES SERVER.
BUMMER.
SO WHAT NOW? WE LOST 'EM THIS TIME, BUT YOU KNOW THEY'RE GONNA KEEP LOOKIN' FOR US.
YEAH, THEY WILL...
AND EVEN IF THEY DON'T FIND US, WE CAN'T FORGET ABOUT SLASH AND THE OTHER MUTANIMALS THEY STILL HAVE.
WE CAN'T FORGET ABOUT THEIR TECH, EITHER, LEO.
YOU SAW WHAT THEY THREW AT US EARLIER—AND I'M BETTING THAT'S JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG.
WITHOUT HAROLD'S HELP, AND WITHOUT BETTER INTEL...
...WE'RE OPERATING AT A COMPLETE DISADVANTAGE RIGHT NOW.

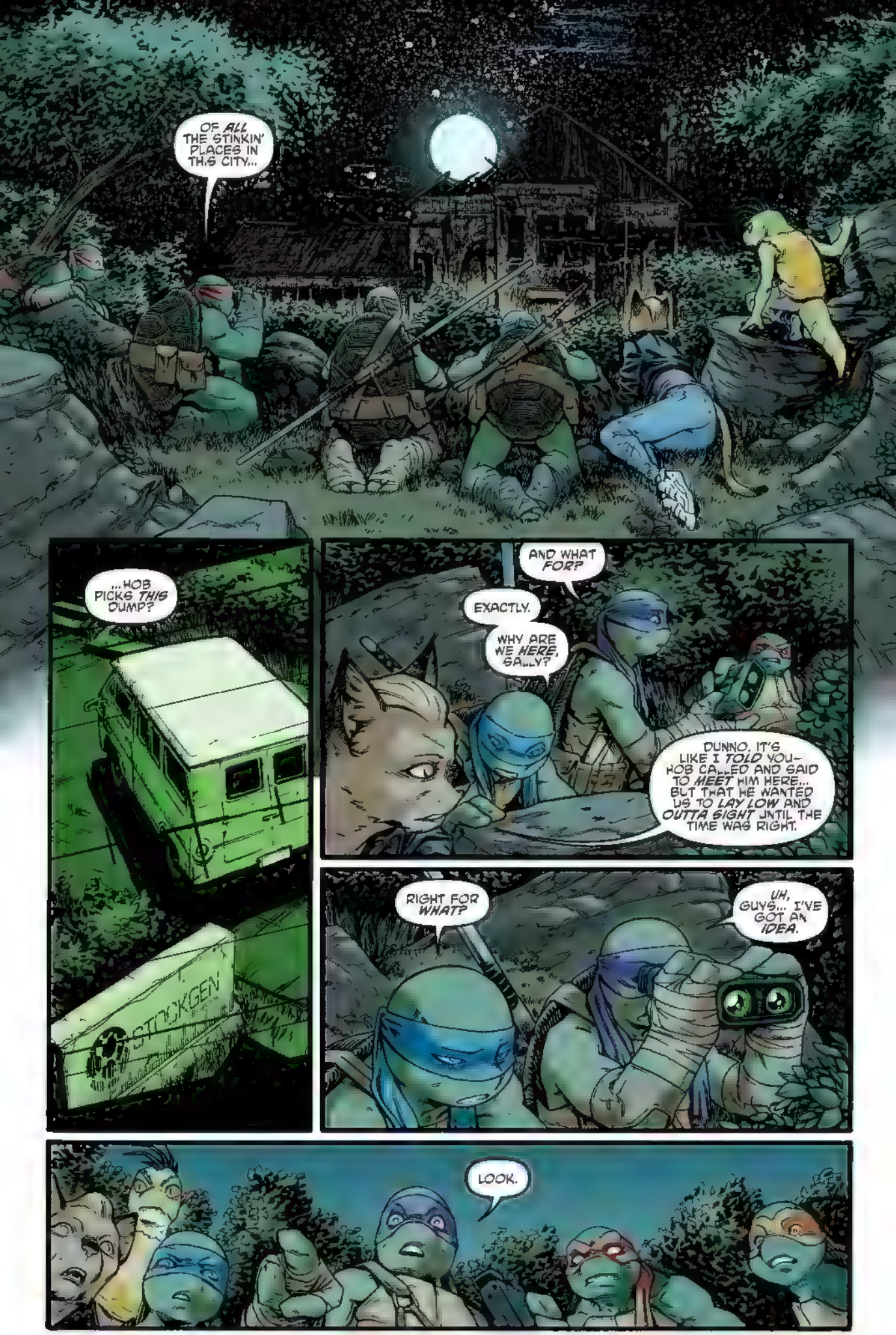
SO, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? WE'RE *NINJAS*, RIGHT? AND SALLY AND MONDO KNOW WHERE THE E.P.F. ARE KEEP'N' THE MUTANIMALS.
LET'S JUST *BUST* INTO THE PLACE AND *SNEAK* 'EM OUTTA THERE.
WORKS FOR ME.
D'TTO.
AREN'T YOU THREE PAYING ATTENTION? WE ARE WAY *OUT-TECHED* BY THESE GUYS. "BUSTING IN" IS NOT A SMART OPTION RIGHT NOW.
MAN, THIS SUCKS
ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THEY'RE BOUND TO BE ON *MAXIMUM ALERT* AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED.
WELL, LOOKS LIKE WE GOT ALL THE CRAP WE *CAN'T* DO DOWN PAT.
MAYBE IT'S TIME WE START FIGJRIN' OJT THE STUFF WE *CAN* DO BEFORE IT'S TOO DAMN LATE.
UM, GJYS...
"...WHERE'D *HOB* GO?"

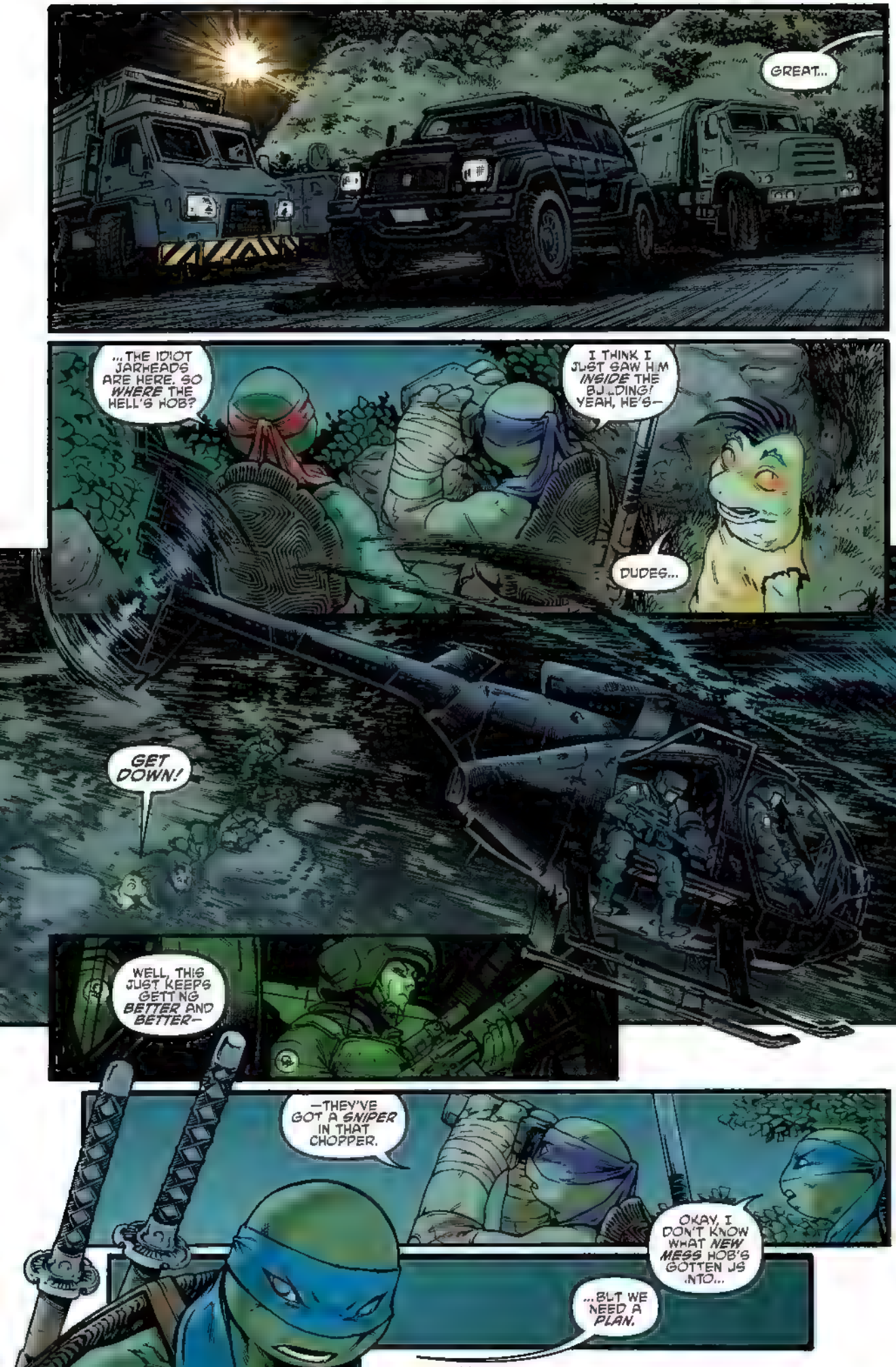
THIS IS AGENT BISHOP.
THE GREATER NEW YORK SENIOR LIVING
HELLO, BISHOP. THIS IS HOB.
THE... THE FELINE MUTANT?
HOW DID YOU GET THIS NUMBER?
THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU SHOULD BE WORRYIN' ABOUT.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOU—
SHHH... SOMEONE WANTS TO SAY H..
S-SON...
...THE MONSTERS FOUND ME.

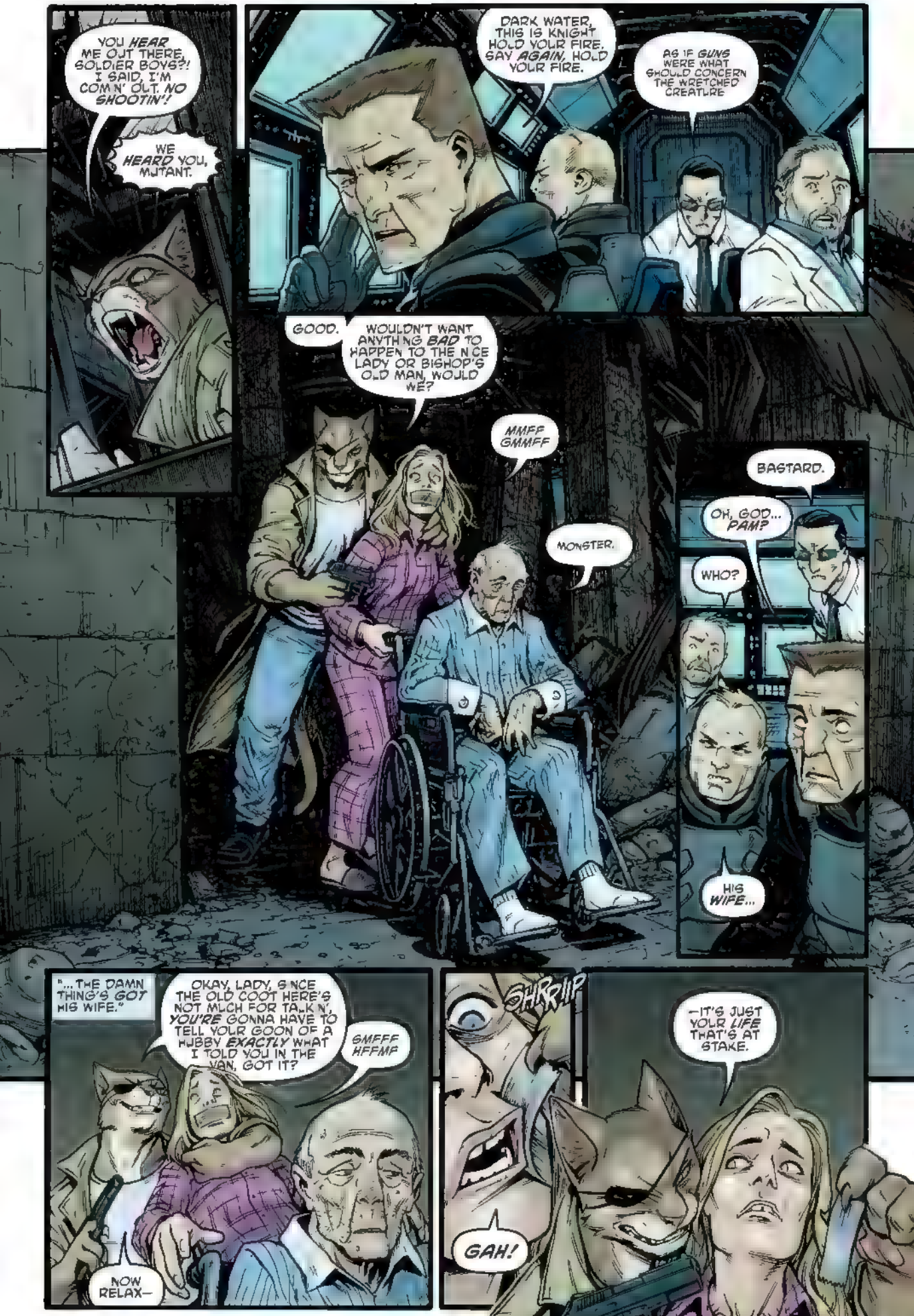
ART BY NICK ROCHE
COLORS BY TOMI VARGA

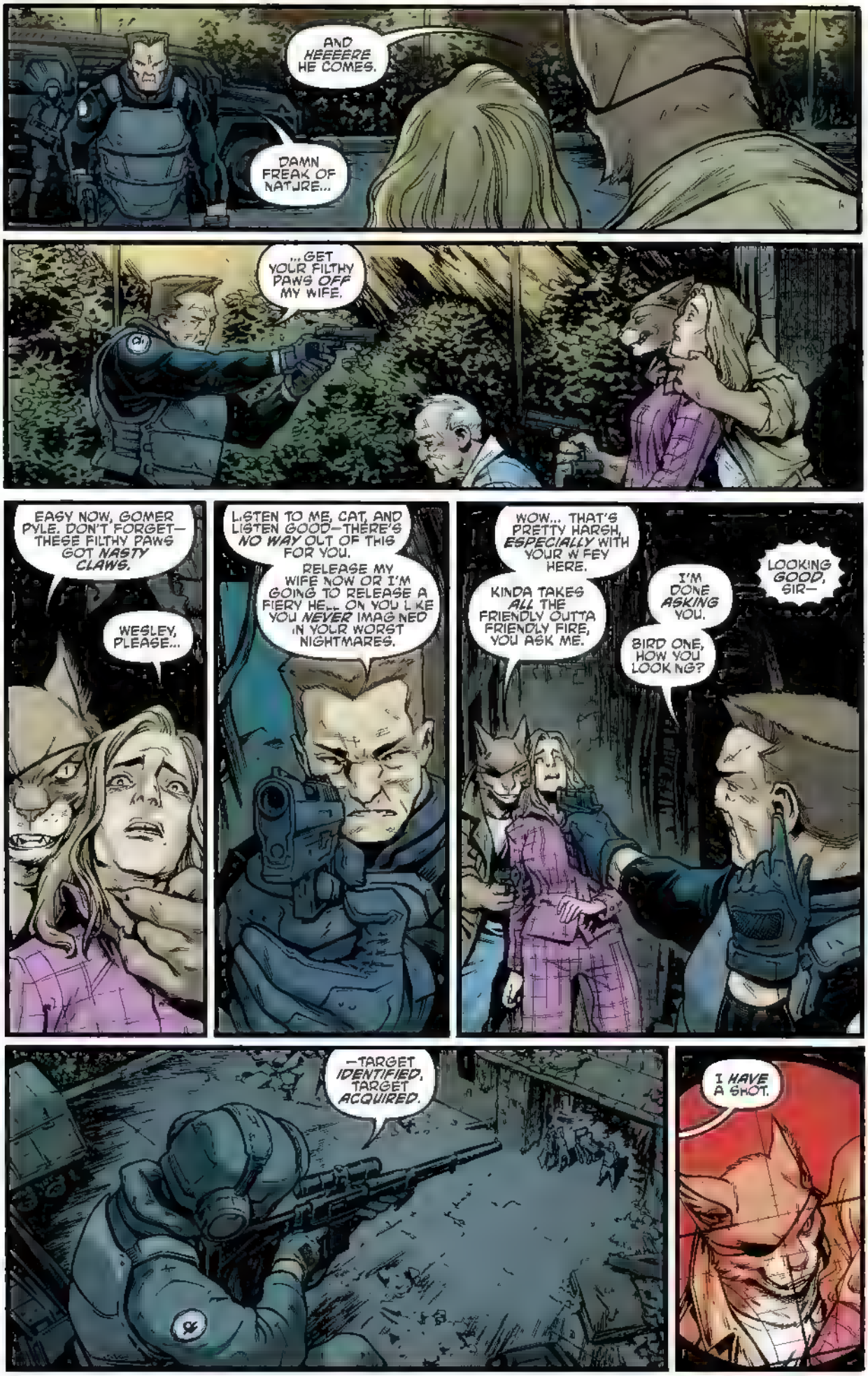
ISSUE #20

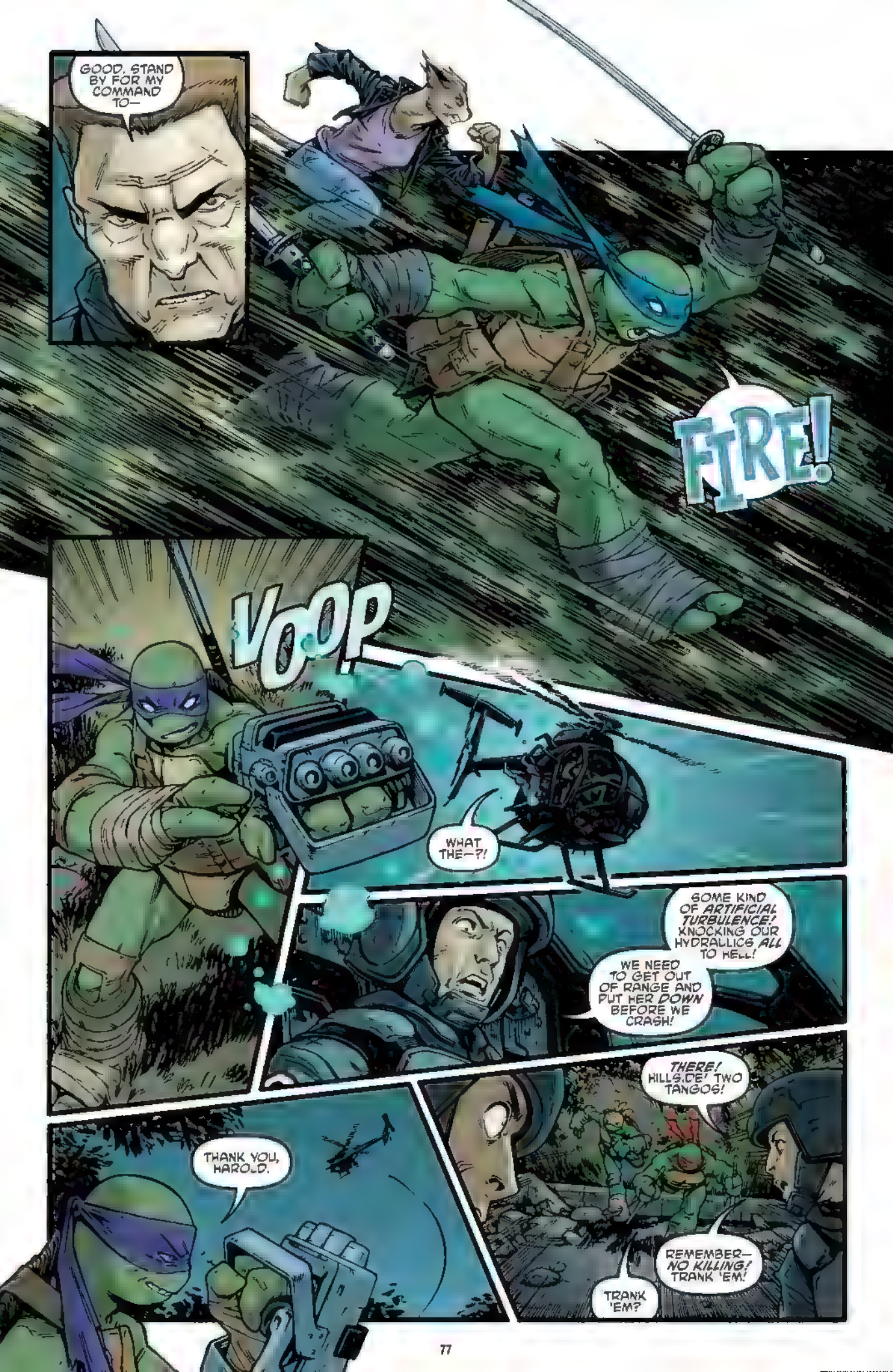
MATEUS SANTOLOUCO


OF ALL THE STINKIN' PLACES IN THIS CITY...
...HOB PICKS THIS DUMP?
STOCKGEN
AND WHAT FOR?
EXACTLY.
WHY ARE WE HERE, SALLY?
DUNNO. IT'S LIKE I TOLD YOU- HOB CALLED AND SAID TO MEET HIM HERE... BUT THAT HE WANTED US TO LAY LOW AND OUTTA SIGHT UNTIL THE TIME WAS RIGHT.
RIGHT FOR WHAT?
UH, GUYS... I'VE GOT AN IDEA.
LOOK.


GREAT...
...THE IDIOT JARHEADS ARE HERE. SO *WHERE* THE HELL'S HOB?
I THINK I JUST SAW HIM *INSIDE* THE BU..DING! YEAH, HE'S—
DUDES...
GET DOWN!
WELL, THIS JUST KEEPS GETTING *BETTER* AND *BETTER*—
—THEY'VE GOT A *SNIPER* IN THAT CHOPPER.
OKAY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT *NEW MESS* HOB'S GOTTEN US INTO...
...BUT WE NEED A *PLAN.*


YOU HEAR ME OUT THERE, SOLDIER BOYS?! I SAID, I'M COM'N' OUT. NO SHOOTIN'!
WE HEARD YOU, MUTANT.
DARK WATER, THIS IS KNIGHT HOLD YOUR FIRE, SAY AGAIN, HOLD YOUR FIRE.
AS IF GUNS WERE WHAT SHOULD CONCERN THE WRETCHED CREATURE
GOOD.
WOULDN'T WANT ANYTHING BAD TO HAPPEN TO THE NICE LADY OR BISHOP'S OLD MAN, WOULD WE?
MMFF GMMFF
MONSTER.
BASTARD.
OH, GOD... PAM?
WHO?
HIS WIFE...
"... THE DAMN THING'S GOT HIS WIFE."
OKAY, LADY, SINCE THE OLD COOT HERE'S NOT MUCH FOR TALK'N', YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO TELL YOUR GOON OF A HUBBY EXACTLY WHAT I TOLD YOU IN THE VAN, GOT IT?
GMFFF HFFMF
NOW RELAX—
SHRIP
GAH!
—IT'S JUST YOUR LIFE THAT'S AT STAKE.

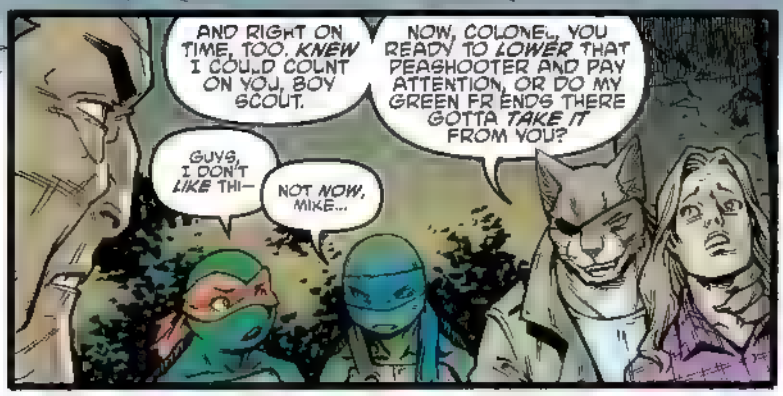

AND HEEEERE HE COMES.
DAMN FREAK OF NATURE...
...GET YOUR FILTHY PAWS OFF MY WIFE.
EASY NOW, GOMER PYLE. DON'T FORGET— THESE FILTHY PAWS GOT NASTY CLAWS.
WESLEY, PLEASE...
LISTEN TO ME, CAT, AND LISTEN GOOD—THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF THIS FOR YOU.
RELEASE MY WIFE NOW OR I'M GOING TO RELEASE A FIERY HELL ON YOU LIKE YOU NEVER IMAGINED IN YOUR WORST NIGHTMARES.
WOW... THAT'S PRETTY HARSH, ESPECIALLY WITH YOUR WIFEY HERE.
KINDA TAKES ALL THE FRIENDLY OUTTA FRIENDLY FIRE, YOU ASK ME.
I'M DONE ASKING YOU.
BIRD ONE, HOW YOU LOOKING?
LOOKING GOOD, SIR—
—TARGET IDENTIFIED, TARGET ACQUIRED.
I HAVE A SHOT.

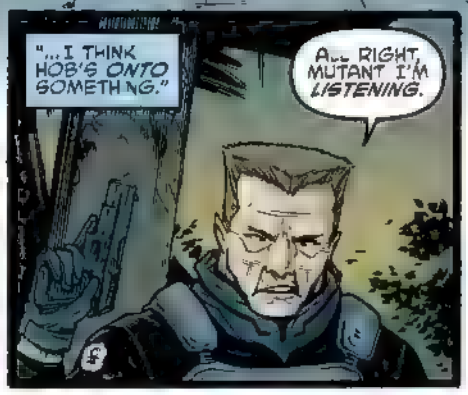

GOOD. STAND BY FOR MY COMMAND TO—
FIRE!
VOOP
WHAT THE—?!
SOME KIND OF ARTIFICIAL TURBULENCE! KNOCKING OUR HYDRAULICS ALL TO HELL!
WE NEED TO GET OUT OF RANGE AND PUT HER DOWN BEFORE WE CRASH!
THERE! HILLSIDE! TWO TANGOS!
REMEMBER— NO KILLING! TRANK 'EM!
TRANK 'EM?
THANK YOU, HAROLD.

KRAK
MORE LIKE *FLANK* 'EM.
AND *SPANK* 'EM.
FWAK
C'MON, PRIVATE! WE NEED TO GET THAT *ARRAY* FIRED UP!
I'M TYPING AS *FAST* AS I CAN, CORPORAL!
NOT FAST ENOUGH, DUDE.
KLONK
SURPRISE!
YO! *GALLY!*
WANNA DRIVE?

YOU KNOW IT!
AND YOU BOTH KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT, RIGHT?
YEAH.
HACK.
AND ATTACK!
AAHH!
I'M BURNING UP!
HOLY CRAP, WE'RE WINNIN'!
I KNOW— CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?!
YEAH, DUDES...
"...LEO'S PLAN TOTALLY WORKED!"
OKAY, HOB...
MONSTERS AND MONSTERS AND MONSTERS...

...WE'RE HERE.


AND RIGHT ON TIME, TOO. KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU, BOY SCOUT.
NOW, COLONEL, YOU READY TO LOWER THAT PEASHOOTER AND PAY ATTENTION, OR DO MY GREEN FRIENDS THERE GOTTA TAKE IT FROM YOU?
GUYS, I DON'T LIKE THI—
NOT NOW, MIKE...

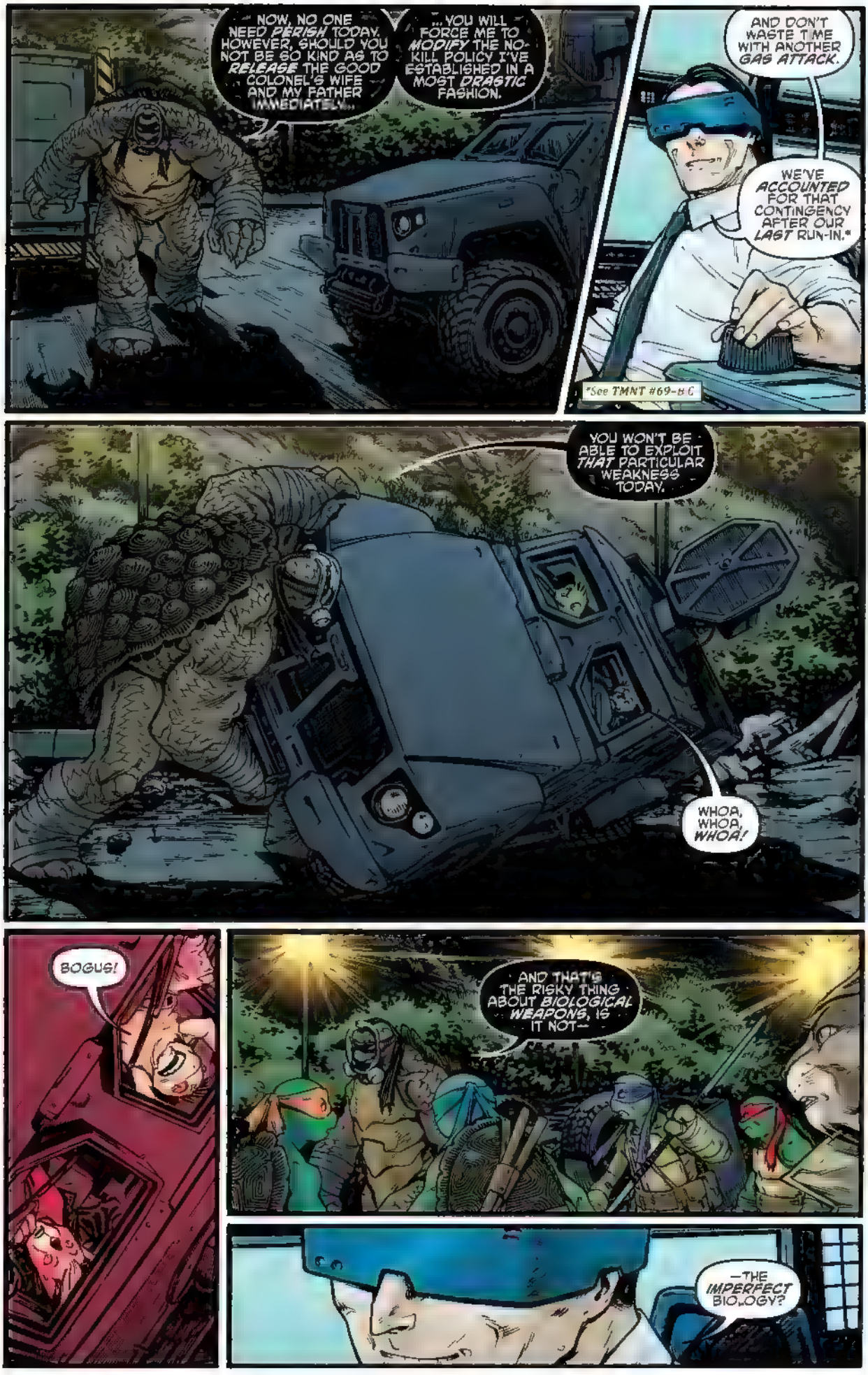

"...I THINK HOB'S ONTO SOMETHING."
ALL RIGHT, MUTANT I'M LISTENING.

OKAY, SWEETHEART. DO YOUR THING

W-WESLEY, LISTEN, HONEY... PLEASE... HE... HE JUST WANTS HIS FAMILY BACK. THE... THE OTHERS LIKE HIM.
HE SAID... HE SAID IF YOU DO THAT, HE'LL RETURN THIS POOR MAN AND ME BACK TO YOU, AND... AND THEN THEY'LL LEAVE US, WESLEY...

...THEY'LL LEAVE US ALONE.
AND... IF I DON'T AGREE?

HE'S GOING TO KI... KI—
IT'S OKAY, MRS. JARHEAD—I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE.
IT'S NOT TOO COMPLICATED. I CAME HERE TO GET MY FAM..LY—ALL OF THEM—AND IF YOU DON'T GIVE 'EM BACK TO ME ASAP, I'M GONNA ASSUME THEY'RE DEAD.
AND IF THEY'RE DEAD, WELL, THEY'RE GONNA HAVE PLENTY OF COMPANY BEFORE I'M DONE...
...STARTIN' WITH YOUR MISSUS HERE.
=GASP=
THEN I HATE TO BE THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS, CREATURE...
KCHK-SHH
...BUT THE EARTH PROTECTION FORCE DOES NOT NEGOTIATE WITH MUTANTS...
...EVER.


NOW, NO ONE NEED PERISH TODAY. HOWEVER, SHOULD YOU NOT BE SO KIND AS TO RELEASE THE GOOD COLONEL'S WIFE — AND MY FATHER IMMEDIATELY...
...YOU WILL FORCE ME TO MODIFY THE NO-KILL POLICY I'VE ESTABLISHED IN A MOST DRASTIC FASHION.
AND DON'T WASTE TIME WITH ANOTHER GAS ATTACK.
WE'VE ACCOUNTED FOR THAT CONTINGENCY AFTER OUR LAST RUN-IN.*
*See TMNT #69-B&C
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT THAT PARTICULAR WEAKNESS TODAY.
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA!
BOGUS!
AND THAT'S THE RISKY THING ABOUT BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS, IS IT NOT—
—THE IMPERFECT BIO..OGY?

I MEAN, HERE'S THIS NEAR *INVINCIBLE* BEAST, ABLE TO WITHSTAND AN *ENTIRE BUILDING* FALLING UPON ITS HEAD, BROUGHT TO ITS *KNEES* IN BATTLE BY WATERY EYES AND A SNOT-FILLED NOSE.
THE *DICHOTOMY* BOGGLES THE MIND—SUCH A PITIFUL LACK OF SELF-CONTROL AND FRAGILITY *CONTRASTED* AGAINST SUCH SHEER POWER.
REALLY, TODAY'S *DOWNFALL* COULD BE TOMORROW'S *UPRISING*—
—A VOLATILE MIX OF *INSTABILITY* AND *UNPREDICTABILITY* THAT WE HUMANS MUST *NOT* LEAVE UNCHECKED... NOR UNRESTRAINED.
LISTEN TO HIM. CAN'T YOU HEAR HOW STINKIN' *PARANOID* HE IS? I DON'T KNOW WHAT HALF THE WORDS HE'S SAYIN' MEAN, AND EVEN *I* CAN HEAR IT.
HOW DO YOU THINK I *FOUND* YOUR WOMAN, *HUH?* GUY KEEPS *LISTS* WITH *ALL* YOUR PRIVATE INFO. HE DON'T EVEN TRUST *YOU,* KNIGHT!
FORGET THAT LOON—JUST *GIVE* ME MY MUTANIMALS, *TAKE* YOUR WIFE AND YOUR SOLDIERS, AND *GO.* THIS DON'T GOTTA GET *ANY* UGLIER
PLEASE, WESLEY... PLEASE, HE'S *RIGHT*... THIS ISN'T *YOUR* FIGHT...
...IT'S JUST A *JOB.*
IN CASE I WASN'T *CLEAR* BEFORE...
...THE E.P.F. *DOES NOT* NEGOTIATE WITH MUTANTS.
MAYBE NOT—BUT DARK WATER *DOES.*

SERGEANT WINTER?
SIR?
THIS OP IS TERMINATED. DO YOU COPY?
FIVE BY FIVE, COLONEL.
STAND DOWN THE SLASH WEAPON, AGENT BISHOP, AND RELEASE THE MUTANT PRISONERS. I WON'T ASK TWICE.
BUT, WE PAID YOU TO–
WE'RE MERCENARIES, SIR. WARS ARE A DIME A DOZEN, BUT FAMILY?
THAT'S RARE.
"PRICELESS."

HE'S ALIVE BUT... BARELY. IT WAS THE BEST I COULD DO FOR HIM, SALLY, I SWEAR.
LINDSEY, STOP—NOBODY'S BLAMING YOU.
WE'LL GET SEYMOUR HOME AND YOU'LL GET HIM BACK TOGETHER JUST LIKE NEW. IT'S GONNA BE OKAY.
SPEAKIN' OF BRAND-SPANKIN' NEW, CHECK OUT YOUR RAD MITT, DUDE.
ROGER THAT, SOLDIER. GOVERNMENT ISSUE, BUT IT'LL DO.
HI! I'M PETE!
WESLEY, I WANT TO GO HOME.
SO DO I, BABE...
"...SO DO I"
WE... LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE JUST WAITING ON ME.
fwp
HERE—
—HE'S ALL YOURS.
CHEERS.
IT'S LIKE CHRISTMAS AND MY BIRTHDAY PARTY ALL AT ONCE.
PERHAPS. BUT YOU FORGOT ABOUT ONE INVITEE.
DR. SHEVLIN?
Y-YES?

NOW.
I'M GOING TO HATE MYSELF FOR THIS, I JUST KNOW IT...
FWAK
GRRRR...
LOOK OUT!
THANK YOU, DOCTOR. I HAVE THE CONN ONCE AGAIN.
NOW, WOULD YOU PLEASE CALL OUR NEW YORK POLICE FRIENDS WHILE I FINISH THINGS OUT HERE?
UH-OH. THE BIG GUY.
THAT AIN'T THE BIG GUY, K.D.

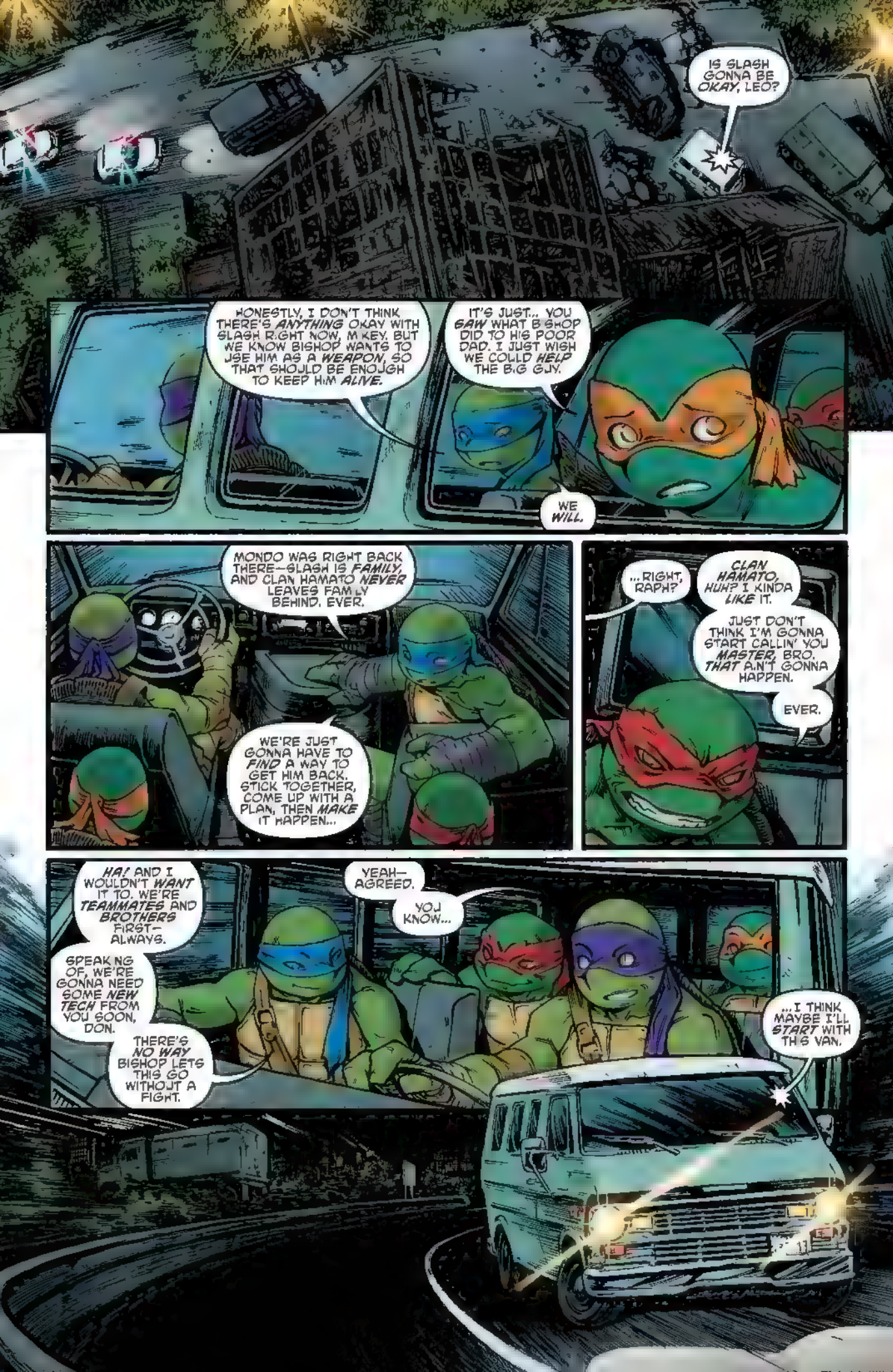
IT'S A RECKONING!
WHOMP
NO, MUTANT, IT'S NOT.
FWIP
SORRY, PAL, I REALLY DON'T WANNA HURT YOU BUT—
YAGGH!
THUD
GUFF!
YOU WERE SAYING, TURTLE?
STOP, BISHOP!

ONE MORE MOVE AND YOUR OLD MAN EATS A BULLET.
S-SON... WHERE AM I?
THAT LIFELESS, MINDLESS SHELL IS NOT MY "OLD MAN," CAT. THAT MAN IS GONE.
WHATEVER MY FATHER ONCE WAS LIVES IN ME NOW—HIS CHOSEN SUCCESSOR.
WAIT, , SON! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
NO.
SEEING YOUR VISION THROUGH, DAD.
SPLATCH
PROTECTING HUMANITY FROM AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT.
GRARR!
SLASH

NO MATTER THE COST.
YOU... YOU KILLED YOUR OWN FATHER.
NO— I FREED HIM FROM A MEANINGLESS, DEBILITATING EXISTENCE.
THOUGH, I MUST ADMIT, DESPITE HIS FAILING STATE, MY FATHER REMAINED CORRECT ABOUT ONE THING—
—TO FIGHT MONSTERS, WE MUST BECOME LIKE THEM.
TO PROTECT AND TO LEAD DOES NOT COME WITHOUT DIFFICULT CHOICES AND SACRIFICE.
I AGREE.
NUHH...
SOMETIMES A LEADER HAS TO BECOME THE THINGS HE HATES...
GYAH!
SHWIIP

...TO TAKE CARE OF THE ONES HE LOVES.

WE-OOO
WE-OOO
ALL R'GHT, THAT'S OUR CUE EVERYONE—WE RE DONE HERE.
TIME TO GO.
LEO'S RIGHT—LET'S GET OUTTA HERE BEFORE WE GOTTA DEAL W TH MORE COWBOYS.
MUTANIMALS IN THE TRUCK! TURTLES, YOU TAKE HOB'S VAN!
COME ON, BIG FE..A, YOU'RE COMING HOME WITH US.
PLEASE
HE CAN'T HEAR YOU, BOSS CAT...
...THE S..ASH MAN'S NOT HERE. NOT REALLY. AND WE CAN'T WA.T FOR HIM, EITHER, 'CAUSE THE FUZZ A..MOST IS. BUT WE'LL GET HIM BACK, DUDE. HE'S FAM.LY.
RIGHT NOW, WE GOTTA VAMOOSE.
THIS... IS NOT DONE, MUTANTS.
YEAH, WHATEVS.
AND GOOD LUCK GROWIN' THOSE BACK, NON-LIZARD DUDE.

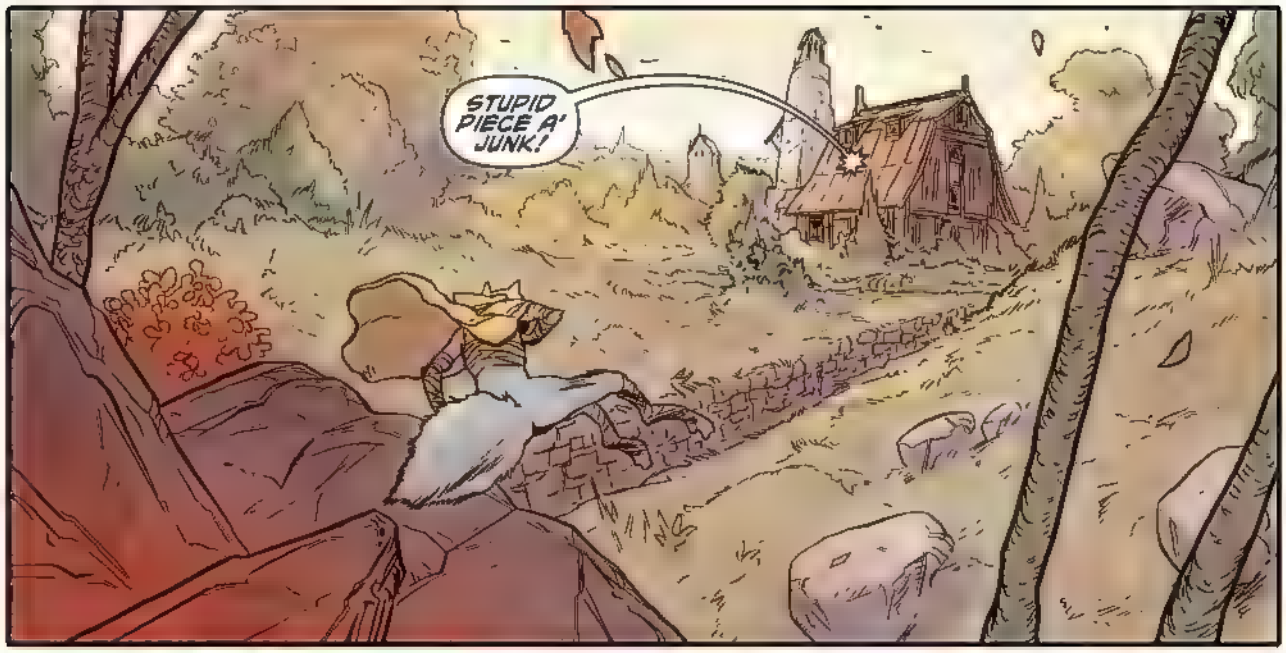

IS SLASH GONNA BE OKAY, LEO?
HONESTLY, I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYTHING OKAY WITH SLASH RIGHT NOW, MIKEY. BUT WE KNOW BISHOP WANTS TO USE HIM AS A WEAPON, SO THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM ALIVE.
IT'S JUST... YOU SAW WHAT BISHOP DID TO HIS POOR DAD. I JUST WISH WE COULD HELP THE BIG GUY.
WE WILL.
MONDO WAS RIGHT BACK THERE--SLASH IS FAMILY, AND CLAN HAMATO NEVER LEAVES FAMILY BEHIND. EVER.
WE'RE JUST GONNA HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO GET HIM BACK. STICK TOGETHER, COME UP WITH A PLAN, THEN MAKE IT HAPPEN...
...RIGHT, RAPH?
CLAN HAMATO, HUH? I KINDA LIKE IT.
JUST DON'T THINK I'M GONNA START CALLIN' YOU MASTER, BRO. THAT AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN.
EVER.
HA! AND I WOULDN'T WANT IT TO. WE'RE TEAMMATES AND BROTHERS FIRST--ALWAYS.
SPEAKING OF, WE'RE GONNA NEED SOME NEW TECH FROM YOU SOON, DON.
THERE'S NO WAY BISHOP LETS THIS GO WITHOUT A FIGHT.
YEAH--AGREED.
YOU KNOW...
...I THINK MAYBE I'LL START WITH THIS VAN.

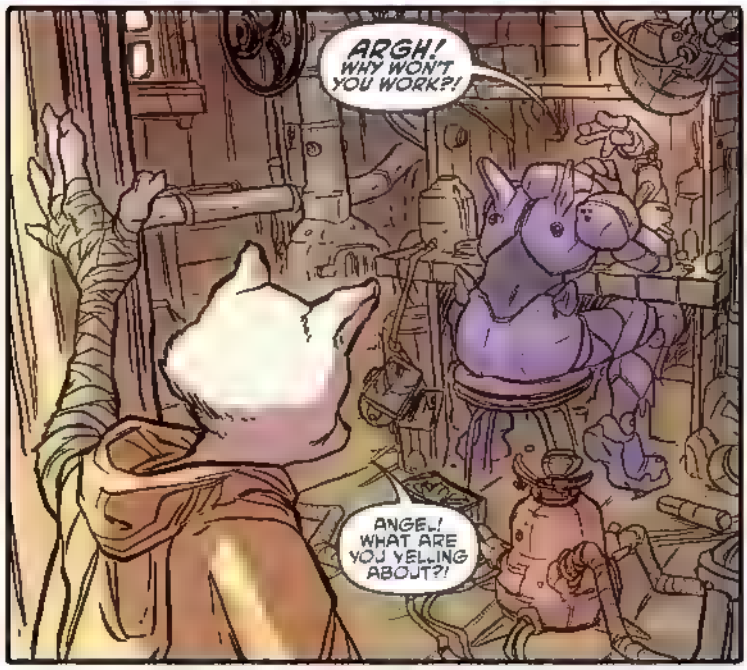
art by CHRIS JOHNSON
colors by MARK ENGLERT

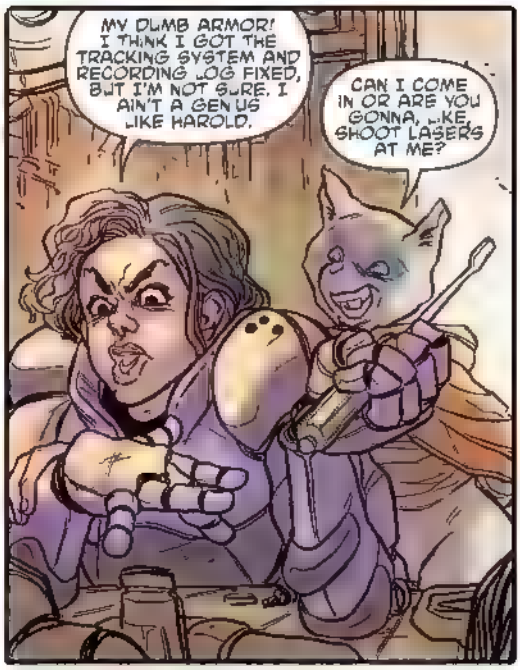
UNIVERSE #9
"TOAD WARRIOR'S BALL"

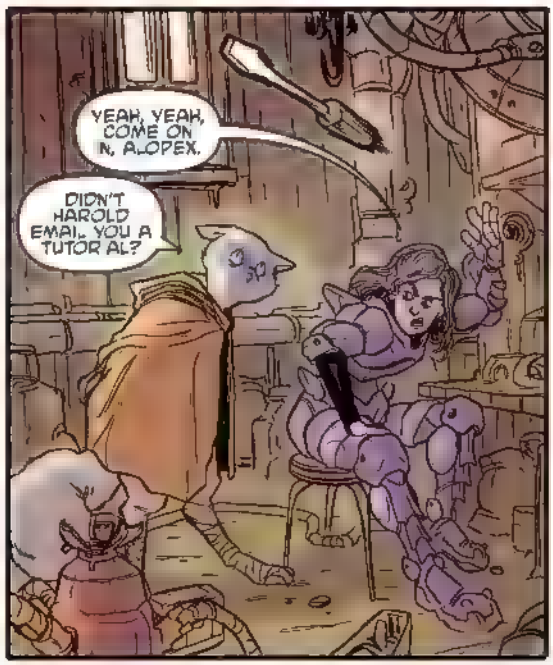
art by FREDDIE E. WILLIAMS II

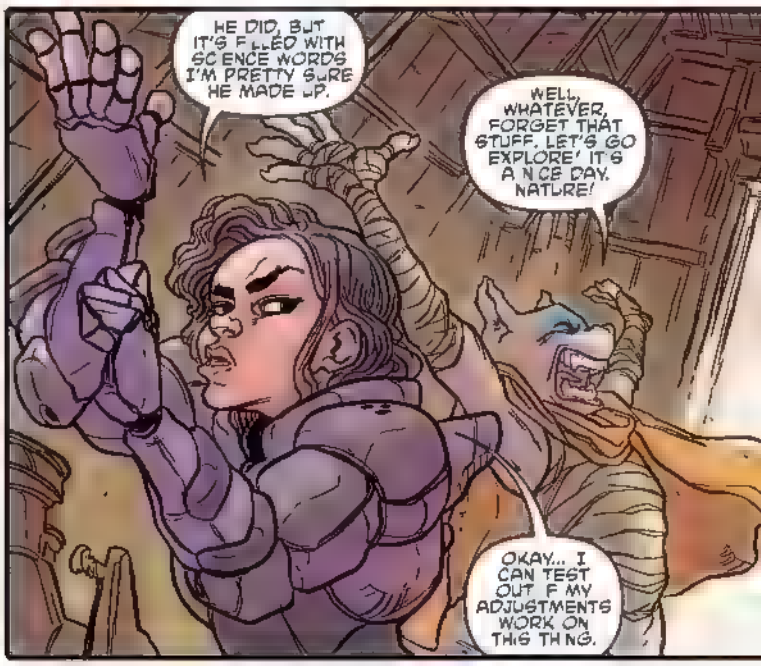
NORTHAMPTON.
CROAK
CROAK
SORRY, LIL' GUY, BUT YOU'RE DISTRACTING. SHOO!
DAMN IT!


STUPID PIECE A' JUNK!


ARGH! WHY WON'T YOU WORK?!
ANGEL! WHAT ARE YOU YELLING ABOUT?!

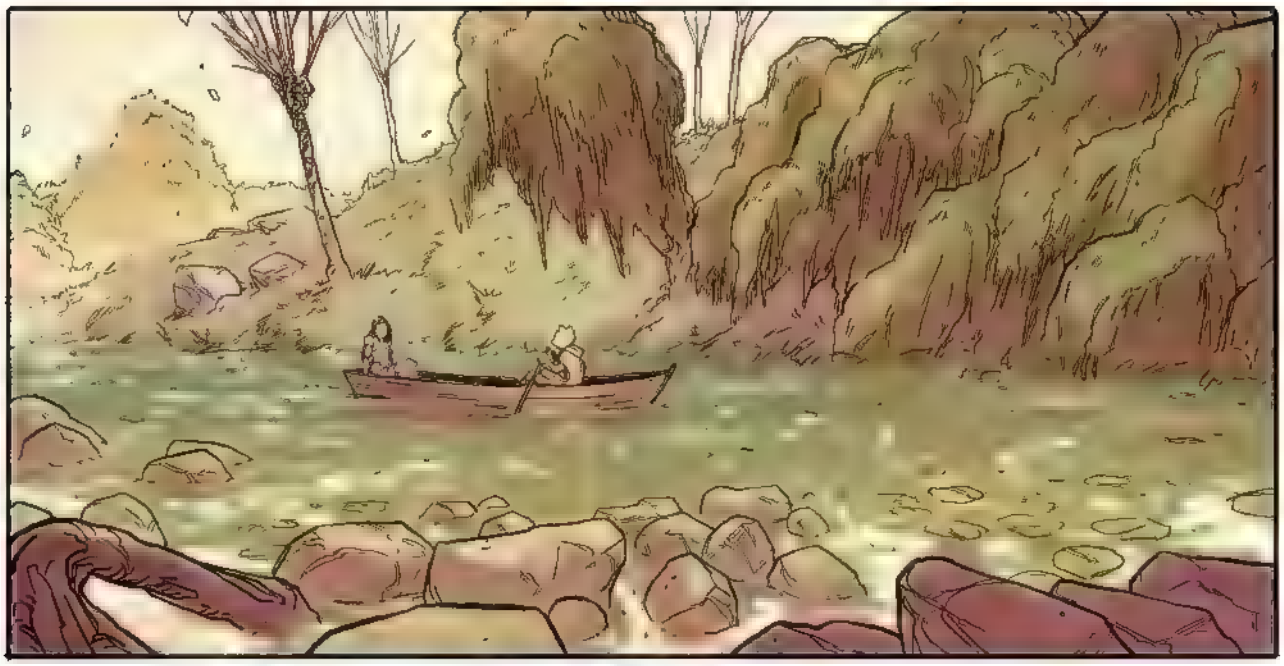

MY DUMB ARMOR! I THINK I GOT THE TRACKING SYSTEM AND RECORDING LOG FIXED, BUT I'M NOT SURE. I AIN'T A GENIUS LIKE HAROLD.
CAN I COME IN OR ARE YOU GONNA, LIKE, SHOOT LASERS AT ME?

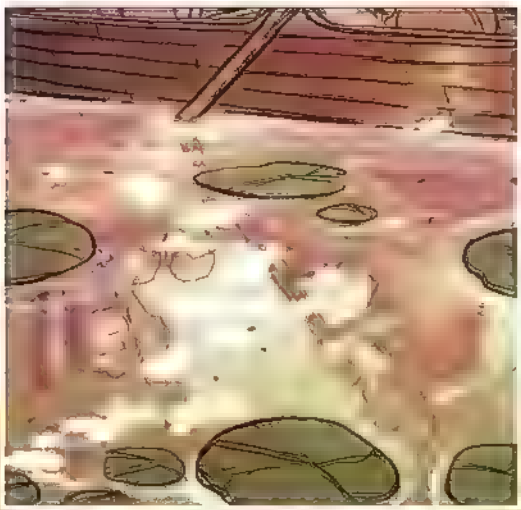

YEAH, YEAH, COME ON IN, ALOPEX.
DIDN'T HAROLD EMAIL YOU A TUTORIAL?

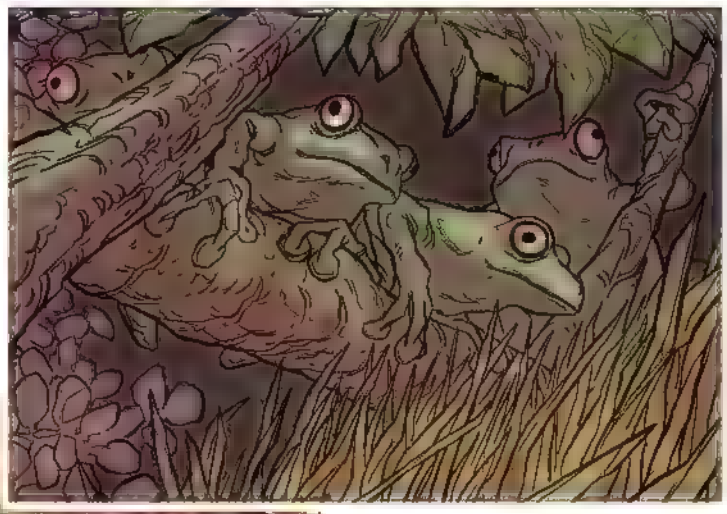

HE DID, BUT IT'S FILLED WITH SCIENCE WORDS I'M PRETTY SURE HE MADE UP.
WELL, WHATEVER. FORGET THAT STUFF. LET'S GO EXPLORE! IT'S A NICE DAY. NATURE!
OKAY... I CAN TEST OUT IF MY ADJUSTMENTS WORK ON THIS THING.

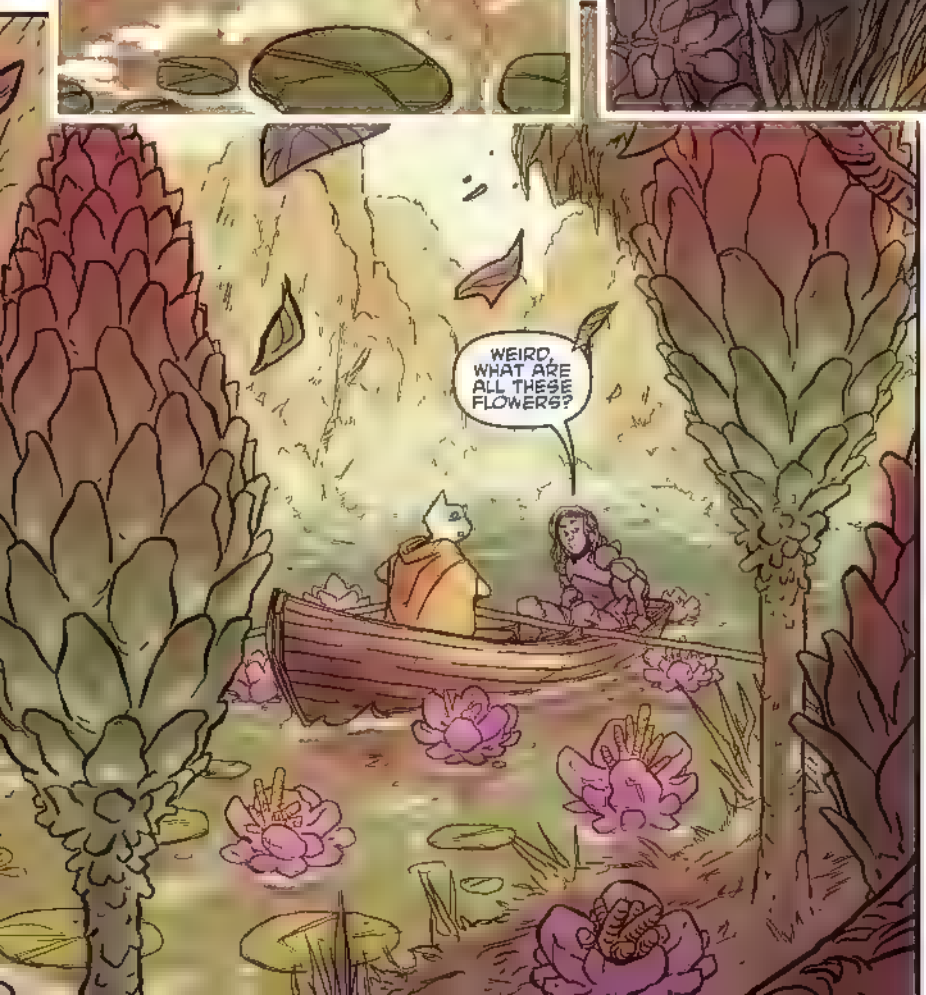
WE SHOULD GET EVERYONE OUT HERE FOR A PARTY. WE COULD HAVE A BIG BONFIRE!
UM... I THINK I NEED QUIET RIGHT NOW. I JUST NEED TO TAKE IT EASY. NO PARTIES.
YEAH, OKAY... I WASN'T THINKING. AFTER ALL YOUR KITSUNE STUFF, YOU DEFINITELY NEED A BREAK.
THANKS. I KNOW I'M BEING A DRAG BUT... THANKS FOR BEING HERE WITH ME, ANGEL.
PFFT. DON'T MENTION IT.
I KEEP THINKING I COULD STAY HERE.
AWAY FROM ALL THE STUPID FIGHTING IN THE CITY. AWAY FROM THE DRAMA.
FOR REAL? YOU'D JUST LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND?
MAYBE. I SUPPOSE I HAVE TO BE INVOLVED SORT OF, SINCE I'M A MUTANT, BUT... I'LL ADMIT I'M PRETTY TIRED OF IT ALL.
WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU COULD LEAVE WHENEVER YOU WANTED TO.

YEAH, BUT I WANNA HELP THE TURTLES, APRIL, AND EVERYONE, Y'KNOW?
BESIDES THEM BEING MY FRIENDS, IT'S LIKE... IT MAKES ME FEEL USEFUL.
OOH, LOOK, A CANOE!
LIKE A SENSE OF PURPOSE?
YEAH, TOTALLY. A SENSE OF PURPOSE. I DUNNO WHAT I'D BE DOIN' WITH MYSELF OTHERWISE.
IT KEEPS ME ON TRACK AND MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I'M DOIN' SOMETHING WITH MY LIFE.
YOU NEVER FEEL LIKE THAT? WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU LEFT ALL THE FIGHTING BEHIND? WHAT ABOUT RAPH?
...LET'S GO OUT ON THE LAKE.
OH... OKAY?





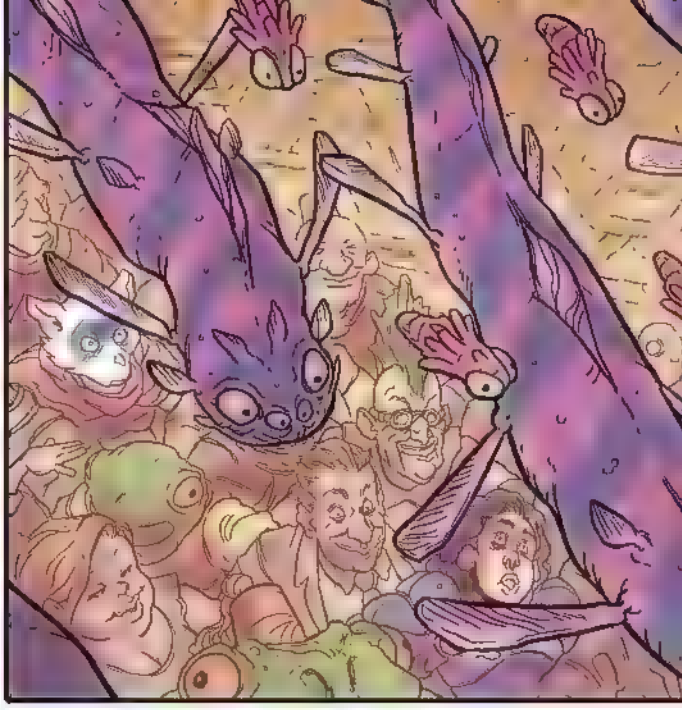


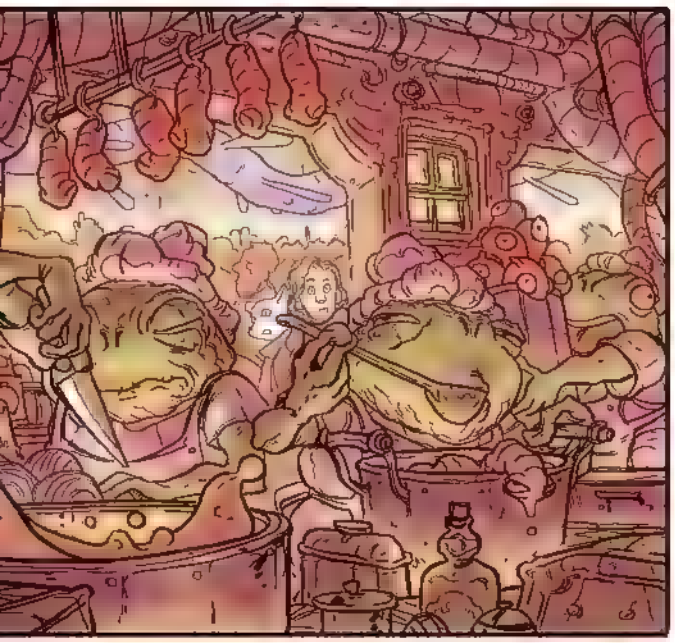

WEIRD, WHAT ARE ALL THESE FLOWERS?

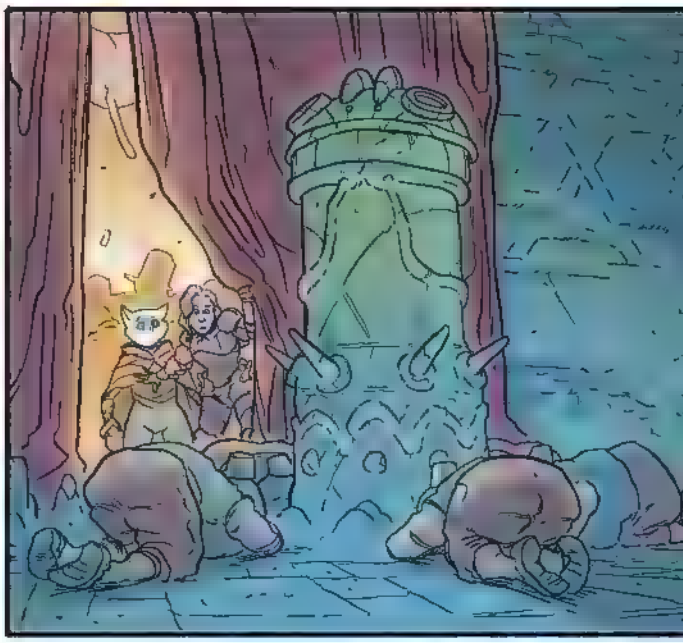
GRRROAAK
AAAGH!

OOF!
ALOPEX, YOU OKAY?
YEAH, I THINK SO WHERE THE HECK ARE WE?
GOOD THING I HAD THIS ON! HUH THE TRACKING DEVICE SAYS WE'RE STILL IN NORTHAMPTON, BUT... A BUNCHA OTHER PLACES, TOO.
THE INDICATOR IS GOIN' NUTS, SKIPPING AROUND TO OTHER LOCATIONS
IT'S ON SOME WEIRD FREQUENCY.
WHAT'S THAT EVEN MEAN?
WELL, WHEN YOU'RE SWALLOWED BY A TOADZILLA, I GU—
CROAK
CRROOOAAAK

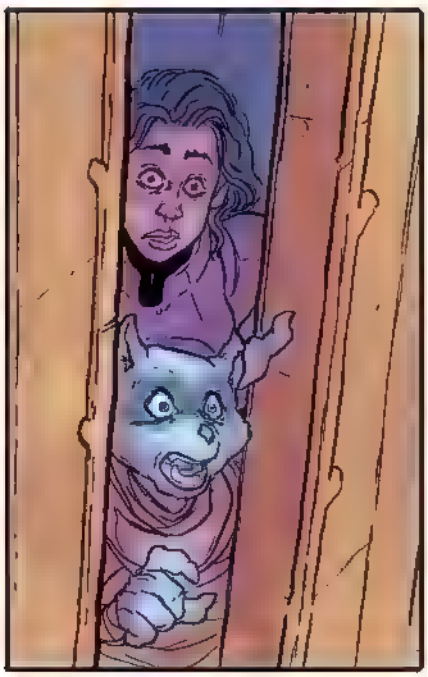
SHOULD WE FOLLOW IT?
I THINK WE HAVE TO.
I HATE THESE SL MY THINGS...
SHH! YOU MIGHT OFFEND THEM.
ONE OF THEM ATE US! THEY OFFENDED ME FIRST!
WHAT THE HELL...
ANGEL! DON'T GET LOST!



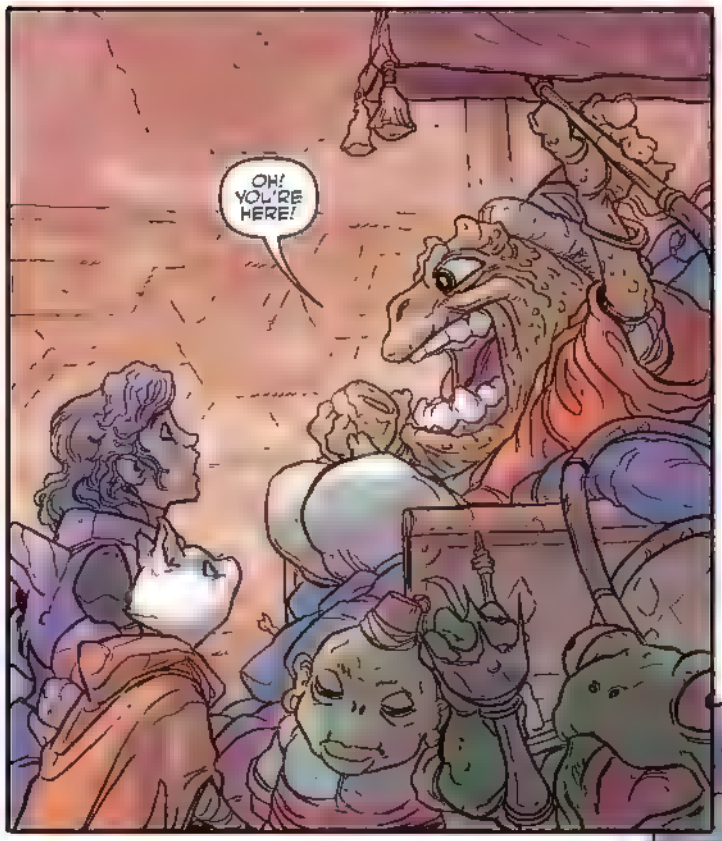


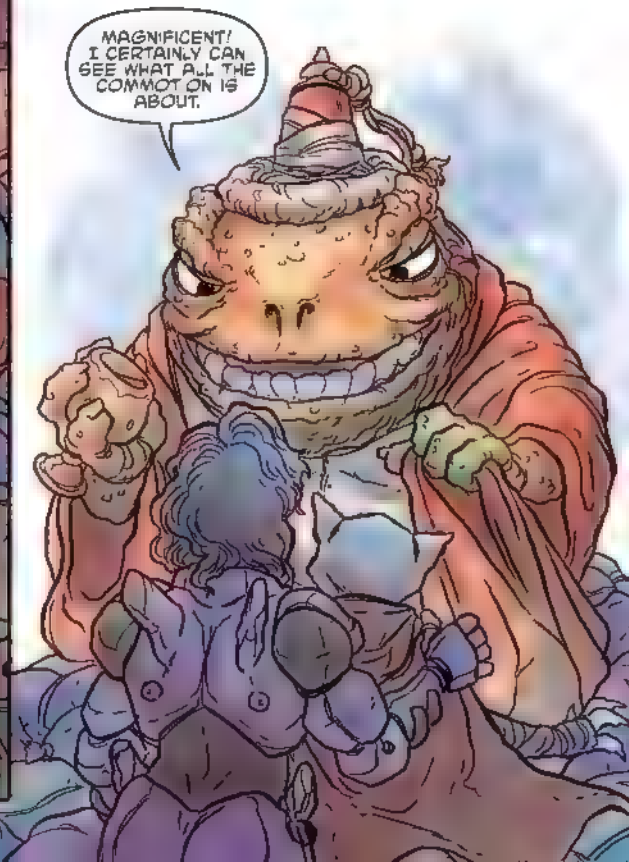


THIS LOOKS MPORTANT...



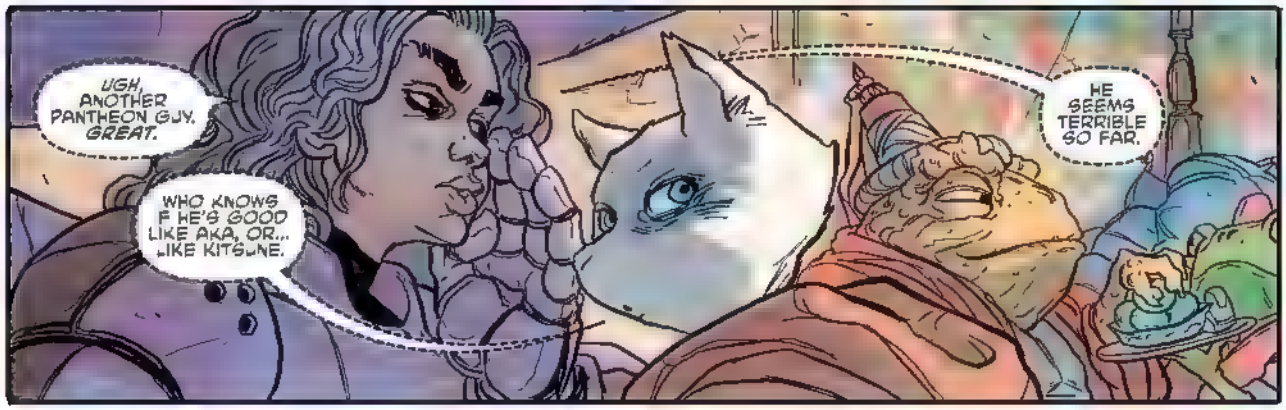
WELL, I HEARD FROM AN ACQUAINTANCE THAT SHE BATHES ONLY ONCE A MONTH.
OH, I KNOW, I KNOW! DREADFUL!

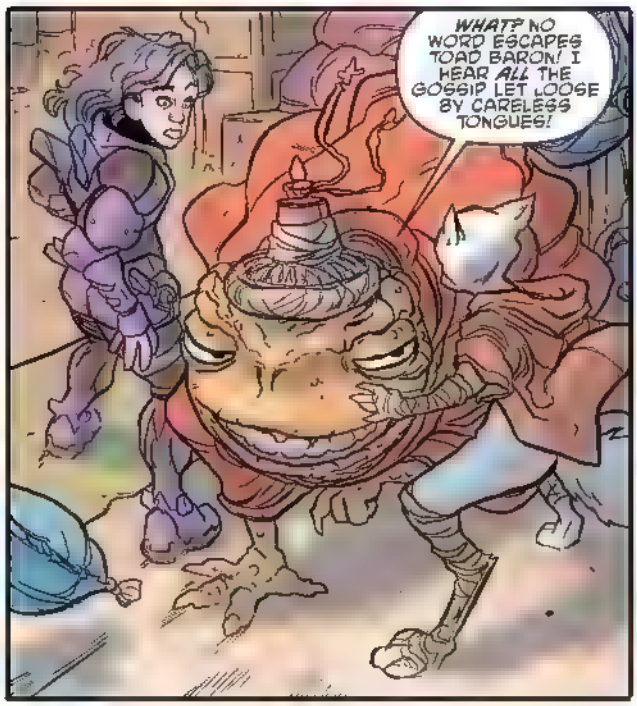

OH! YOU'RE HERE!


MAGNIFICENT! I CERTAINLY CAN SEE WHAT ALL THE COMMOTION IS ABOUT.

WHAT DO THEY CALL YOU? A MUTANT? SUCH A PERFECT ONE, WHITE AND COLD AS THE FALLEN SNOW, BUT WITH A SUBLIME FIRE INSIDE.
AND THE ICY BLUE ON YOUR FACE SUITS YOU SO WELL! LOVELY.
HEY! DON'T TOUCH HER!
HOW DARE YOU...!
URGGGH... WHAT THE HELL...
SO SICK ALL OF A SUDDEN...
RUDE! THOSE WHO STRIKE THEIR HOST WILL SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES!
WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?!
I AM THE TOAD BARON.
THE GOURMAND OF DELIGHTS, HE WHO SWALLOWED THE SECOND SEA, HE WHO STOOD AT THE ABYSS OF HISTORY, KEEPER OF THE NIGHT'S OATH, I AM THAT WHICH EMBITTERS UNFULFILLED WISHES, I AM THE—
OKAY!
WE GET T' WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?!

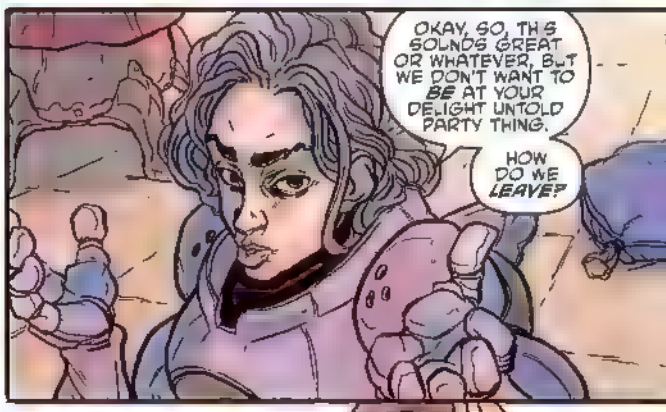
YOU ARE N MY PALACE, THE DEN OF DELIGHTS. BEHOLD ITS SPLENDOR!
LET'S PLAY ALONG UNTIL WE CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET OUT OF HERE. BE NICE.
OKAY, OKAY. I CAN'T HIT HIM WITHOUT ALMOST BARFING, ANYWAY, SO I'M OUT OF MY USUAL IDEAS.
IT'S, UH, ALL REALLY, UM, STUPENDOUS! THE FOOD, THE DECOR... UNPARALLELED!
YEAH, "DOPE." YOU GOT SOME SORTA BIG PARTY COMING UP?
OH, YES. EVERY ONE HUNDRED YEARS MY FAMILY GATHERS FOR THE BANQUET OF GODS, THE FEAST OF THE PANTHEON, AND WE DISCUSS IMPORTANT MATTERS.
THIS TIME I AM HOSTING, AND UNLIKE MY KIN, PLEASURE IS MY PURPOSE, SO I SHALL MAKE THIS AN EVENT EXCEPTIONAL! ITS LEGACY WILL LIVE ON FOREVER!
OH, UH, HOW NICE TO BE INVITED...? YOUR FAMILY... I THINK WE MIGHT BE FAMILIAR WITH THEM. AKA? RAT KING?
...KITSUNE?
YES, YES. THEY ARE RATHER TIRESOME BORES, BUT ONE CANNOT CHOOSE FAMILY.

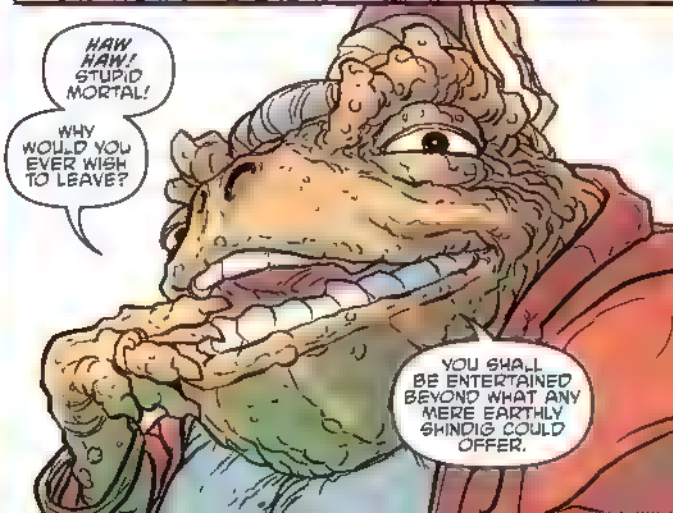

UGH, ANOTHER PANTHEON GUY. GREAT.
WHO KNOWS IF HE'S GOOD LIKE AKA, OR... LIKE KITSUNE.
HE SEEMS TERRIBLE SO FAR.

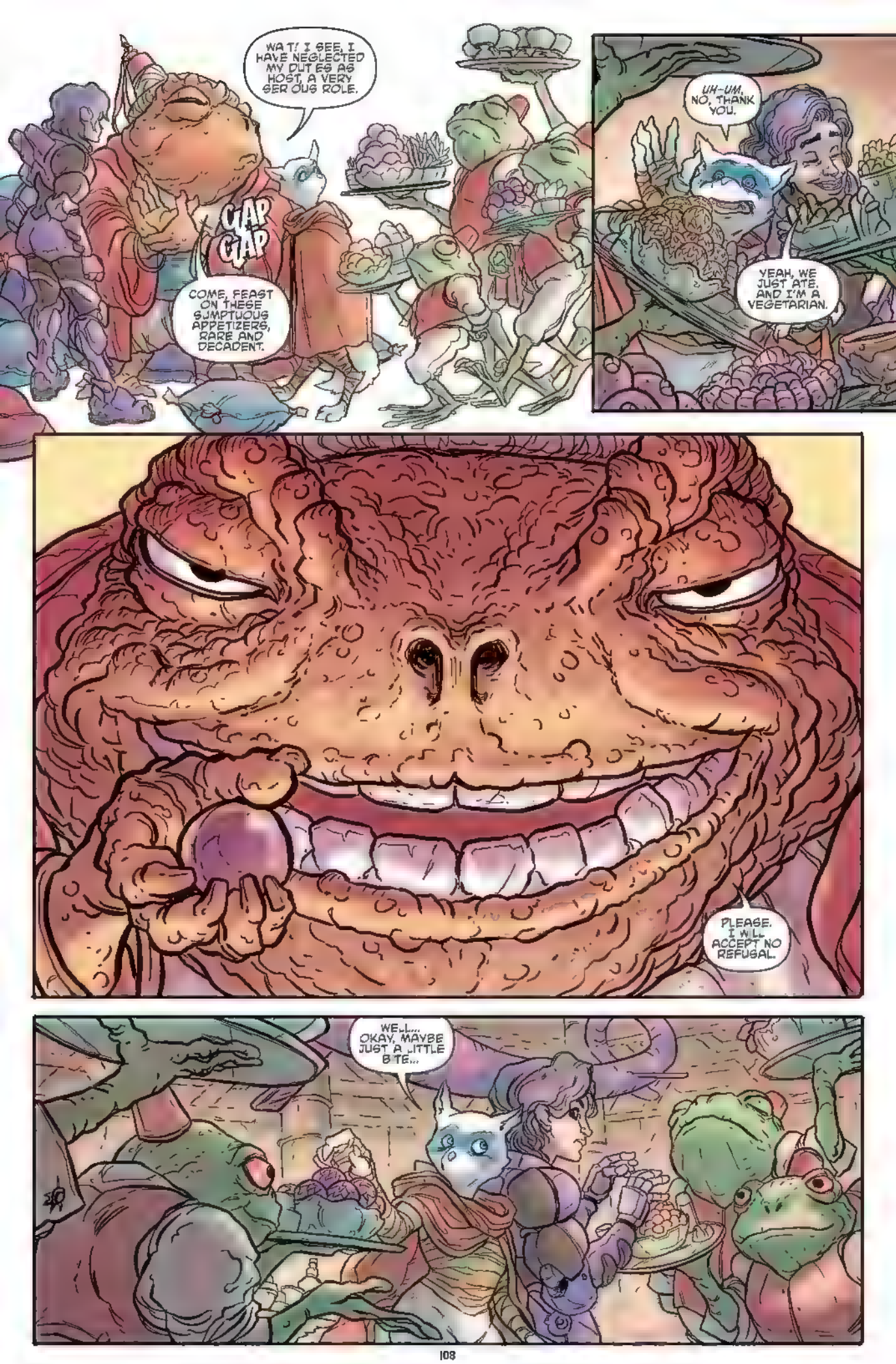

WHAT? NO WORD ESCAPES TOAD BARON! I HEAR ALL THE GOSSIP LET LOOSE BY CARELESS TONGUES!

YOU MAY THINK YOU KNOW US, BUT WE ARE NOT SO SIMPLE. WE ARE ALL UNIQUE, WITH OUR OWN SET OF METHODS AND PREDILECTIONS.
YES, KITSUNE DECEIVES WITH HER CUNNING AND TRICKERY, AND NOTHING AMUSES RAT KING SO MUCH AS SPREADING CHAOS...
...BUT THE TOAD BARON SEEKS PLEASURE AND REVELRY!

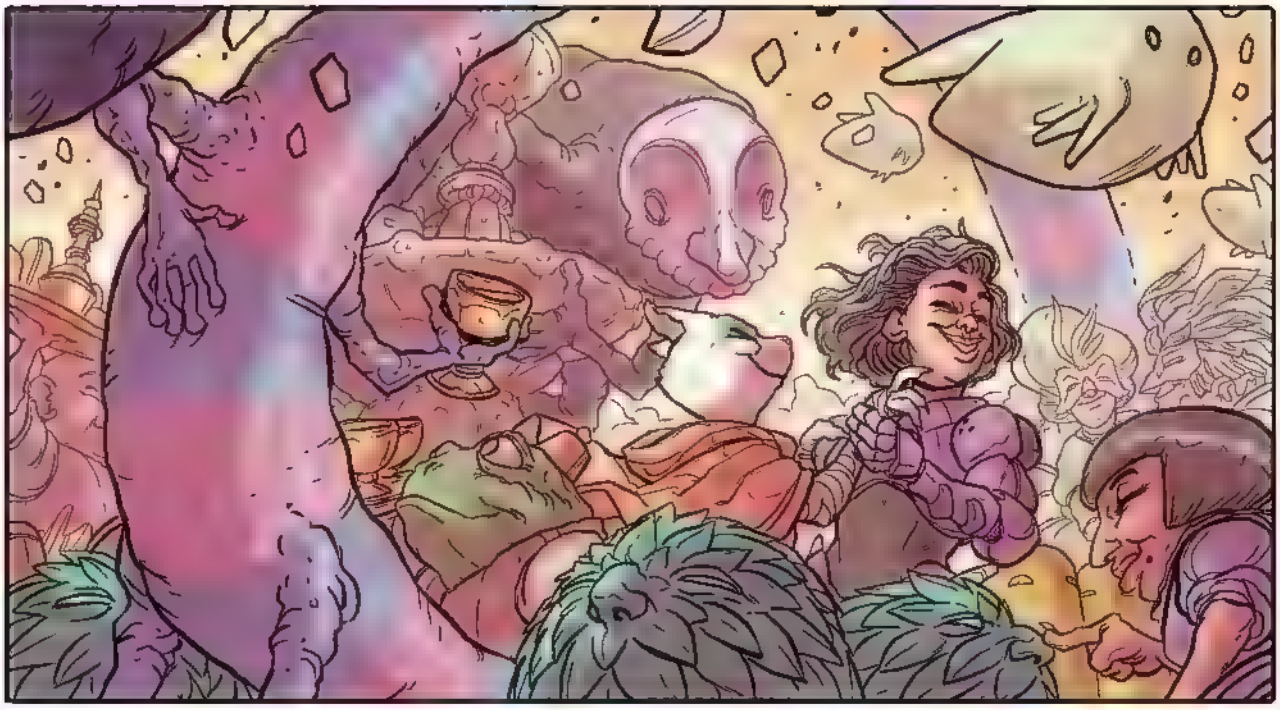
AND THIS SHALL BE A GATHERING OF DELIGHT UNTOLD!

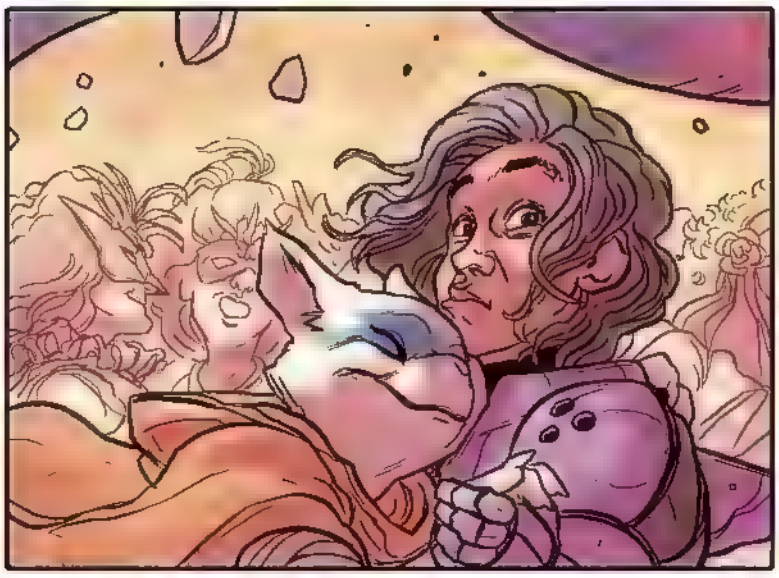

OKAY, SO, THIS SOUNDS GREAT OR WHATEVER, BUT WE DON'T WANT TO BE AT YOUR DELIGHT UNTOLD PARTY THING.
HOW DO WE LEAVE?

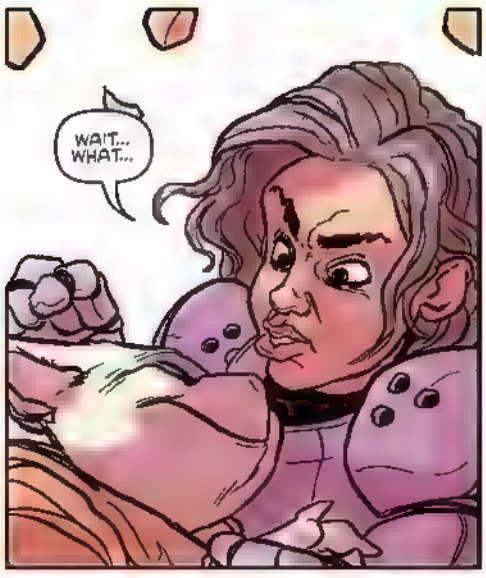

HAW HAW! STUPID MORTAL!
WHY WOULD YOU EVER WISH TO LEAVE?
YOU SHALL BE ENTERTAINED BEYOND WHAT ANY MERE EARTHLY SHINDIG COULD OFFER.


WAIT! I SEE, I HAVE NEGLECTED MY DUTIES AS HOST, A VERY SERIOUS ROLE.
GAP GAP
COME, FEAST ON THESE SUMPTUOUS APPETIZERS, RARE AND DECADENT.
UH-UM, NO, THANK YOU.
YEAH, WE JUST ATE. AND I'M A VEGETARIAN.
PLEASE. I WILL ACCEPT NO REFUSAL.
WE-L... OKAY, MAYBE JUST A LITTLE BITE...

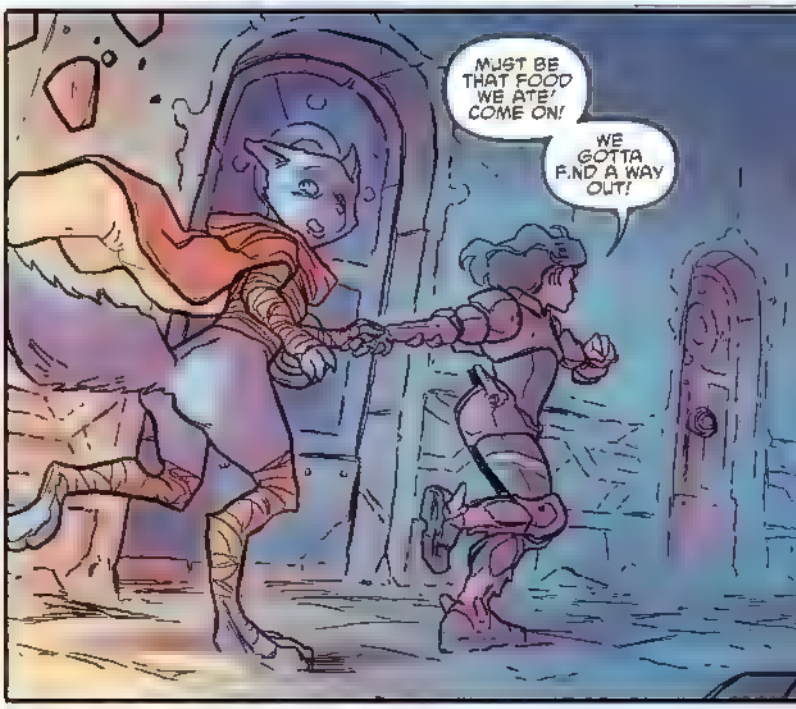
HEY, THIS IS PRETTY GOOD.
MMMFFRM!
MAYBE WE SHOULD, LIKE, . . HANG OUT FOR A BIT?
WE COULD DO,.. RECON, AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS PLACE.. ?
YEAH... RECON...
WHOA...



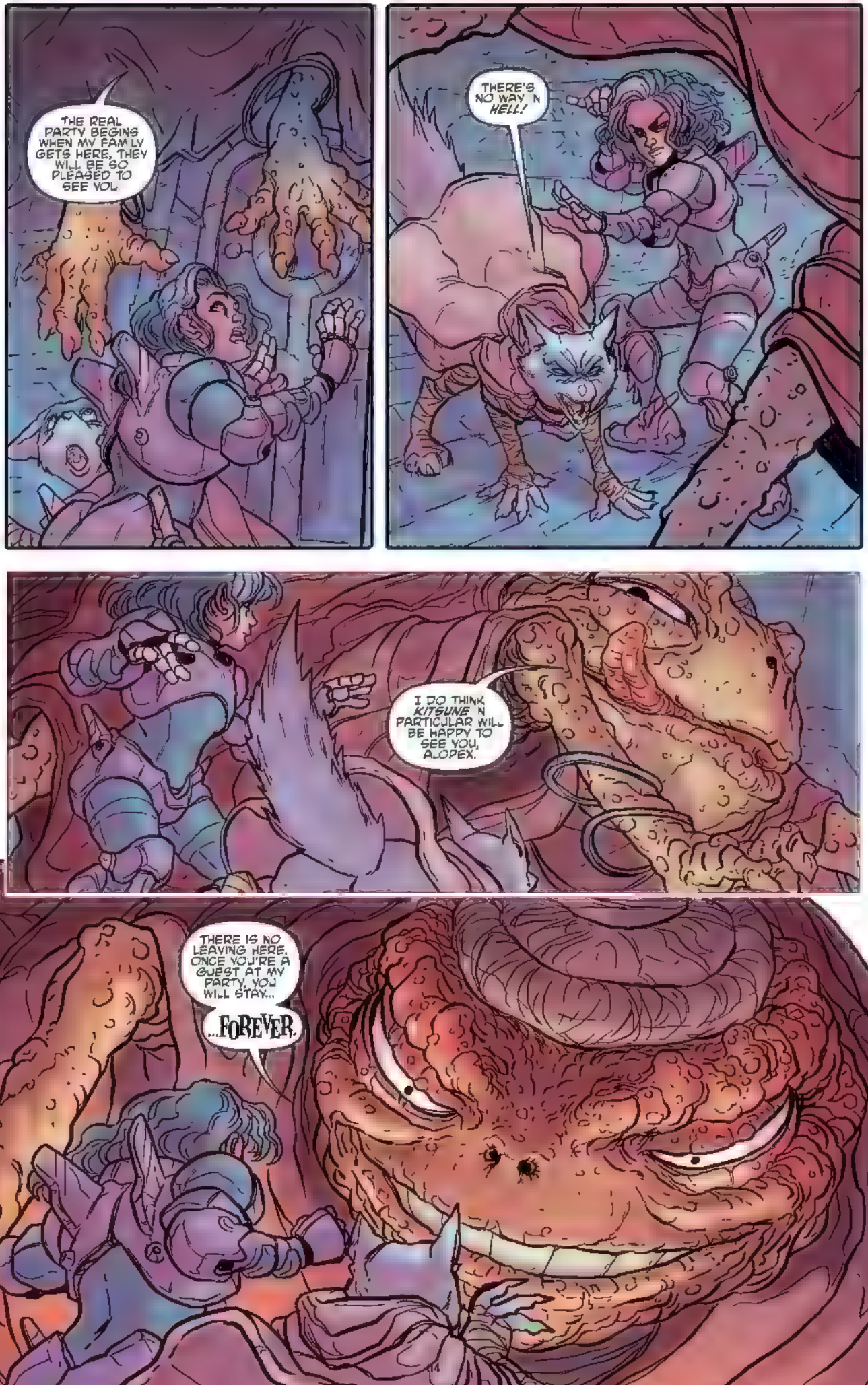



WAIT... WHAT...

ALOPEX! WHY ARE WE DANCING?!
HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN DANCING?!
I... I DON'T KNOW! WE WERE TALKING TO TOAD BARON, AND...


MUST BE THAT FOOD WE ATE! COME ON!
WE GOTTA FIND A WAY OUT!

WE'RE STUCK HERE FOREVER!
NO, STOP, NO WAY, THERE'S GOTTA BE A WAY OUT!
STUPID MORTALS!

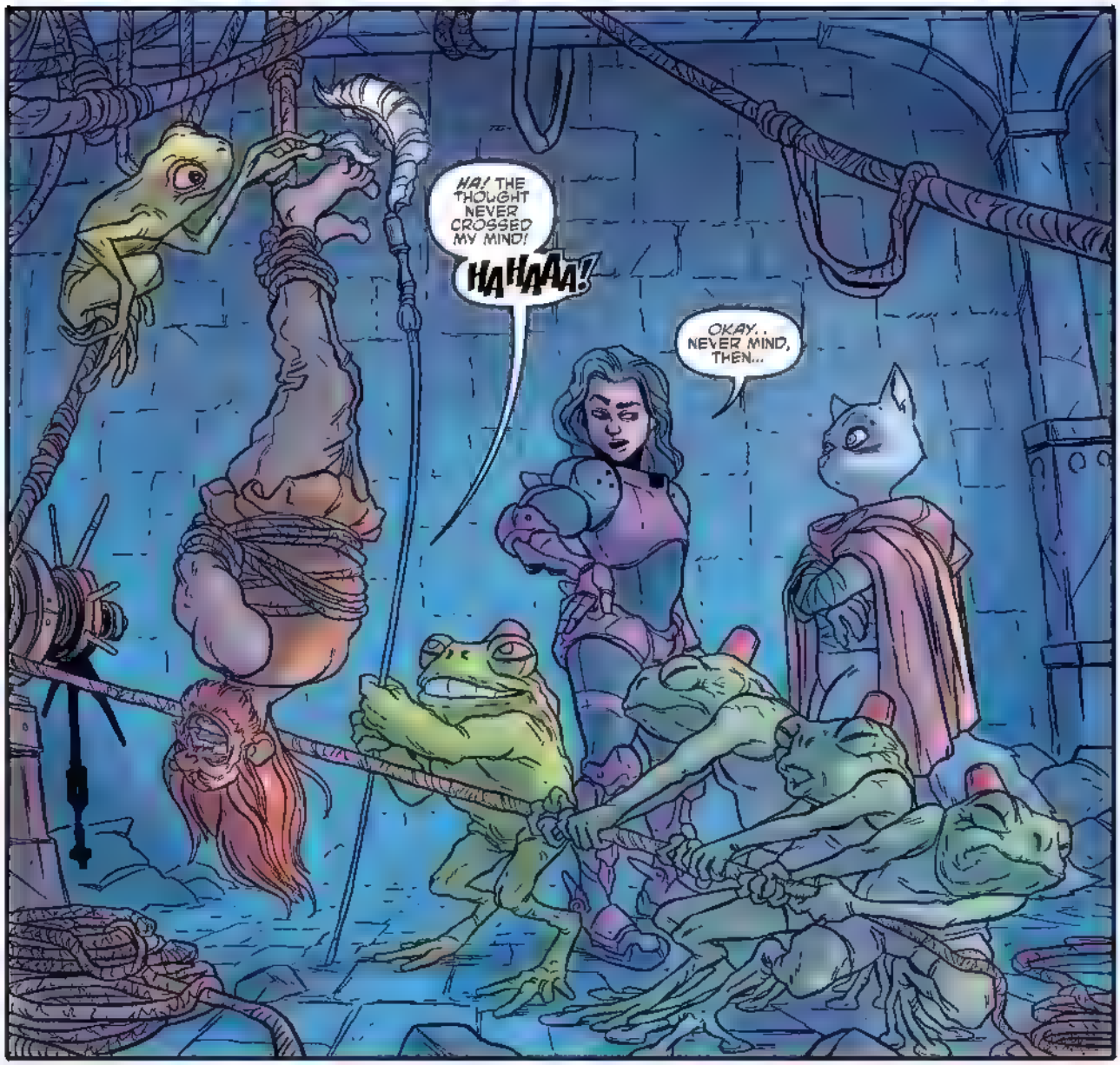

THE REAL PARTY BEGINS WHEN MY FAMILY GETS HERE, THEY WILL BE SO PLEASED TO SEE YOU.
THERE'S NO WAY IN *HELL!*
I DO THINK *KITSUNE* IN PARTICULAR WILL BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU, ALOPEX.
THERE IS NO LEAVING HERE. ONCE YOU'RE A GUEST AT MY PARTY, YOU WILL STAY...
...FOREVER.

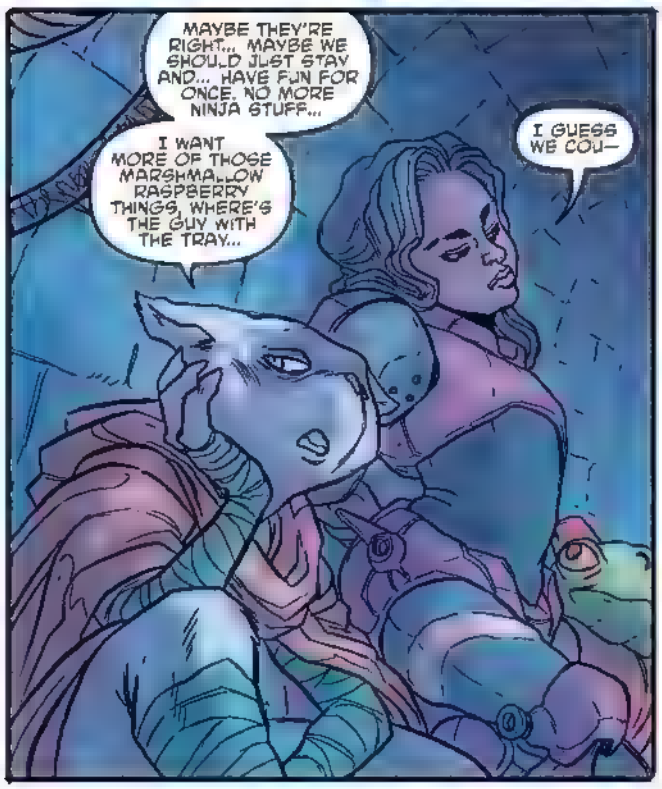
art by PABLO TUNICA

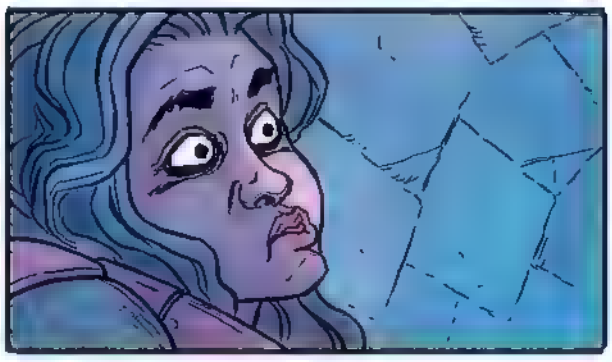
UNIVERSE #19
TOM BARON'S HALL

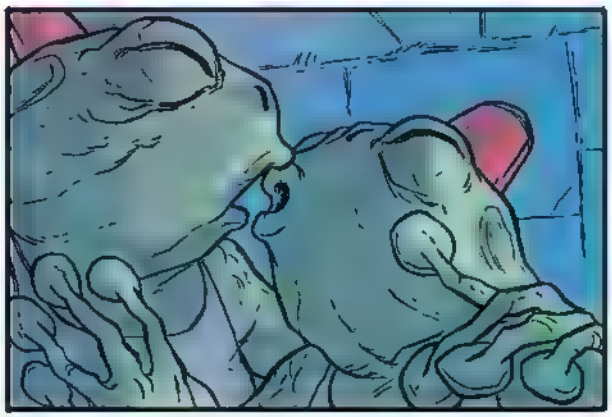
FRENDIF & WILLIAMS II

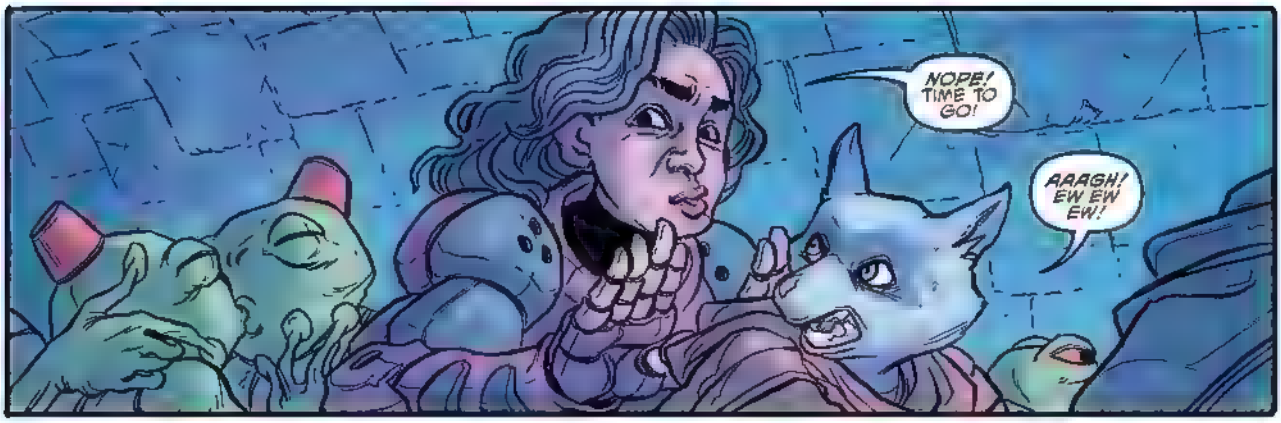
I LIKE IT BETTER HERE IT'S... MERRY.
ME LIKE DRINK.
I TOLD MYSELF I'D LEAVE THE DAY I GOT BORED AND T HASN'T HAPPENED YET!
I DON'T SEE A REASON TO GO BACK. THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT FOR ME THERE
YOU'RE A FURRY FOX CREATURE! OUTSTAND NG, MANNN!
I, UH—
THAT'S A STUPID QUESTION.
YOU SEEN MEGA-BLADE AROUND HERE ANYWHERE?
LEAVE? HA HEH... B-BUT...
HA HA! TO BE—HAHA HONEST?

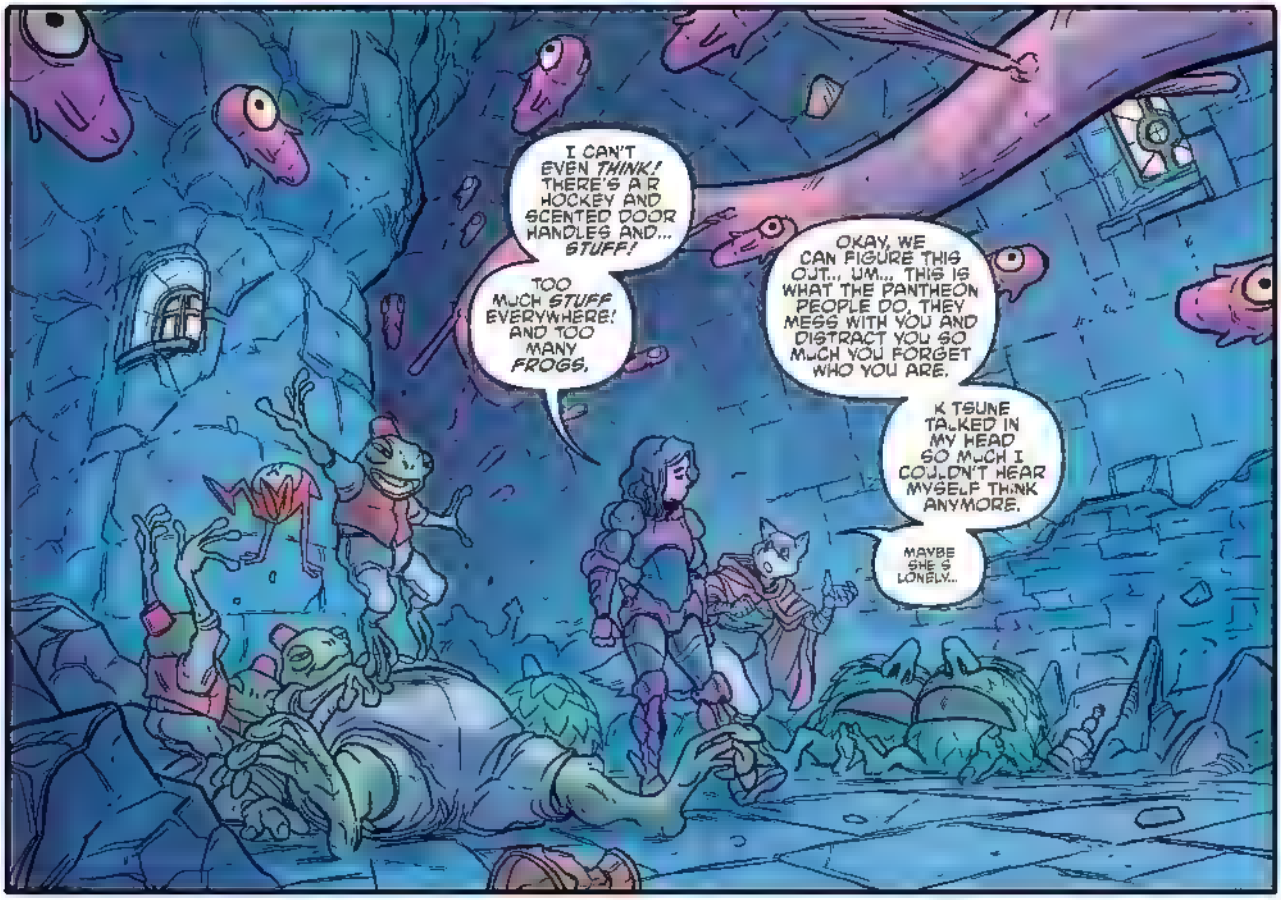

HA! THE THOUGHT NEVER CROSSED MY MIND!
HAHAAA!
OKAY.. NEVER MIND, THEN...

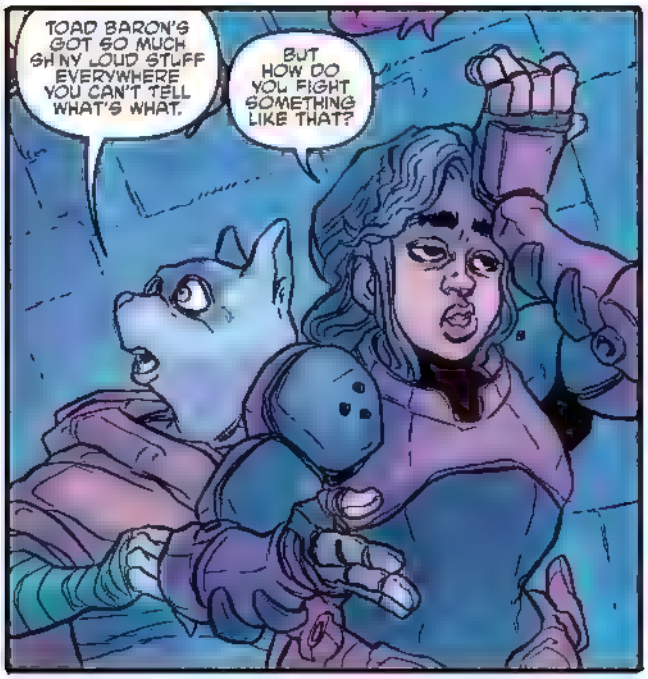

MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT... MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST STAY AND... HAVE FUN FOR ONCE. NO MORE NINJA STUFF...
I WANT MORE OF THOSE MARSHMA...OW RASPBERRY THINGS, WHERE'S THE GUY WITH THE TRAY...
I GUESS WE COU—






NOPE! TIME TO GO!
AAAGH! EW EW EW!

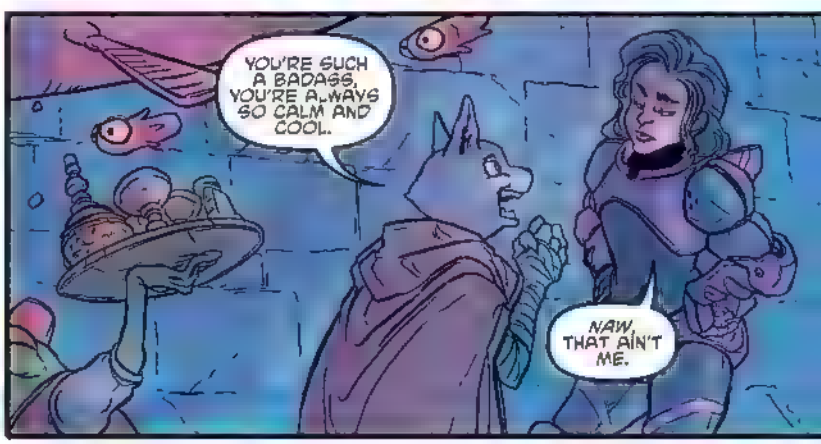

I CAN'T EVEN THINK! THERE'S A R HOCKEY AND SCENTED DOOR HANDLES AND... STUFF!
TOO MUCH STUFF EVERYWHERE! AND TOO MANY FROGS.
OKAY, WE CAN FIGURE THIS OUT... UM... THIS IS WHAT THE PANTHEON PEOPLE DO. THEY MESS WITH YOU AND DISTRACT YOU SO MUCH YOU FORGET WHO YOU ARE.
K TSUNE TALKED IN MY HEAD SO MUCH I COULDN'T HEAR MYSELF THINK ANYMORE.
MAYBE SHE'S LONELY...


TOAD BARON'S GOT SO MUCH SHINY LOUD STUFF EVERYWHERE YOU CAN'T TELL WHAT'S WHAT.
BUT HOW DO YOU FIGHT SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

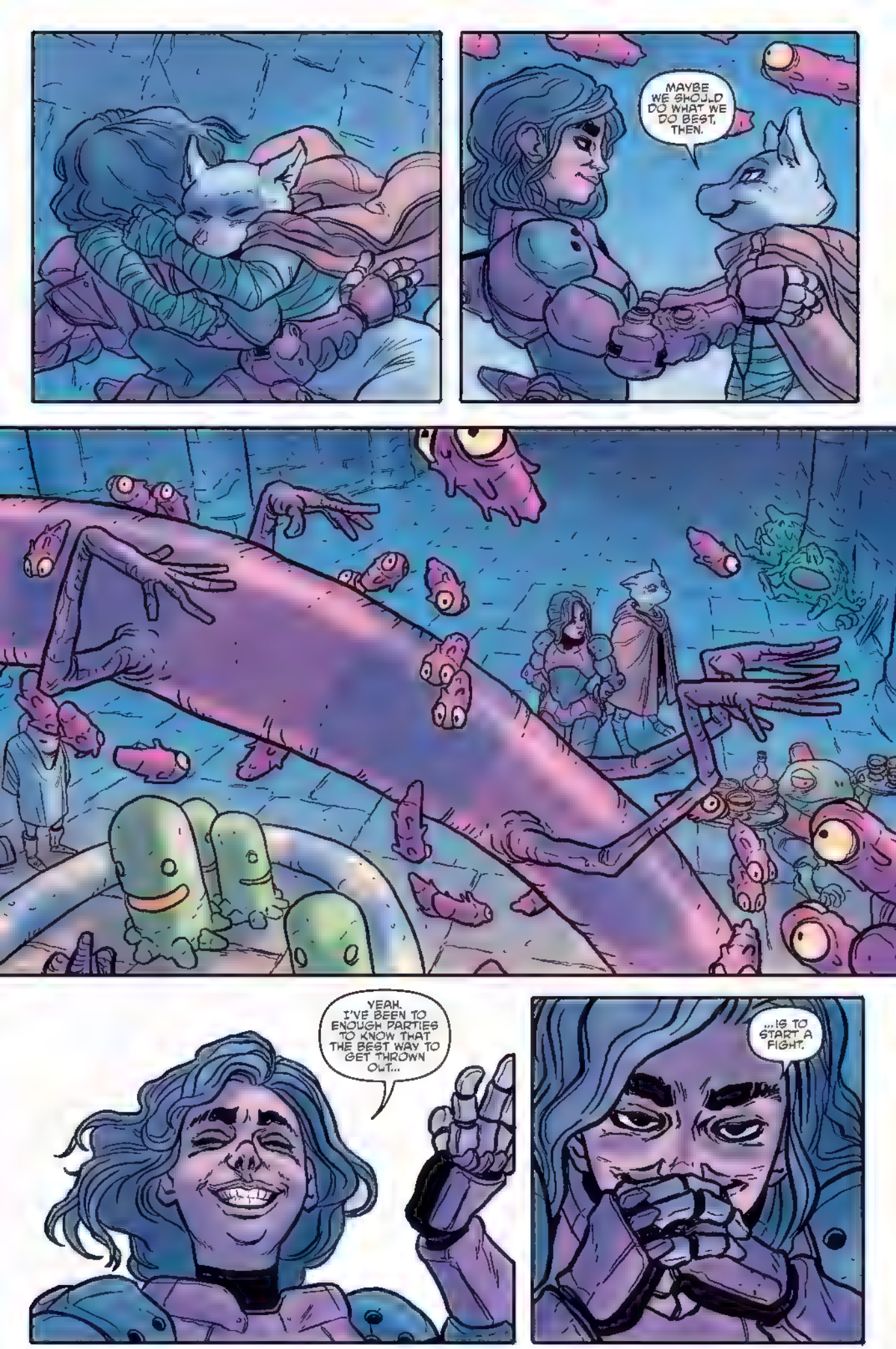
WE FOCUS ON WHAT'S REAL.
YEAH... LIKE US. WHO WE ARE.

"HOME
"FAMILY.
"THE PAST."

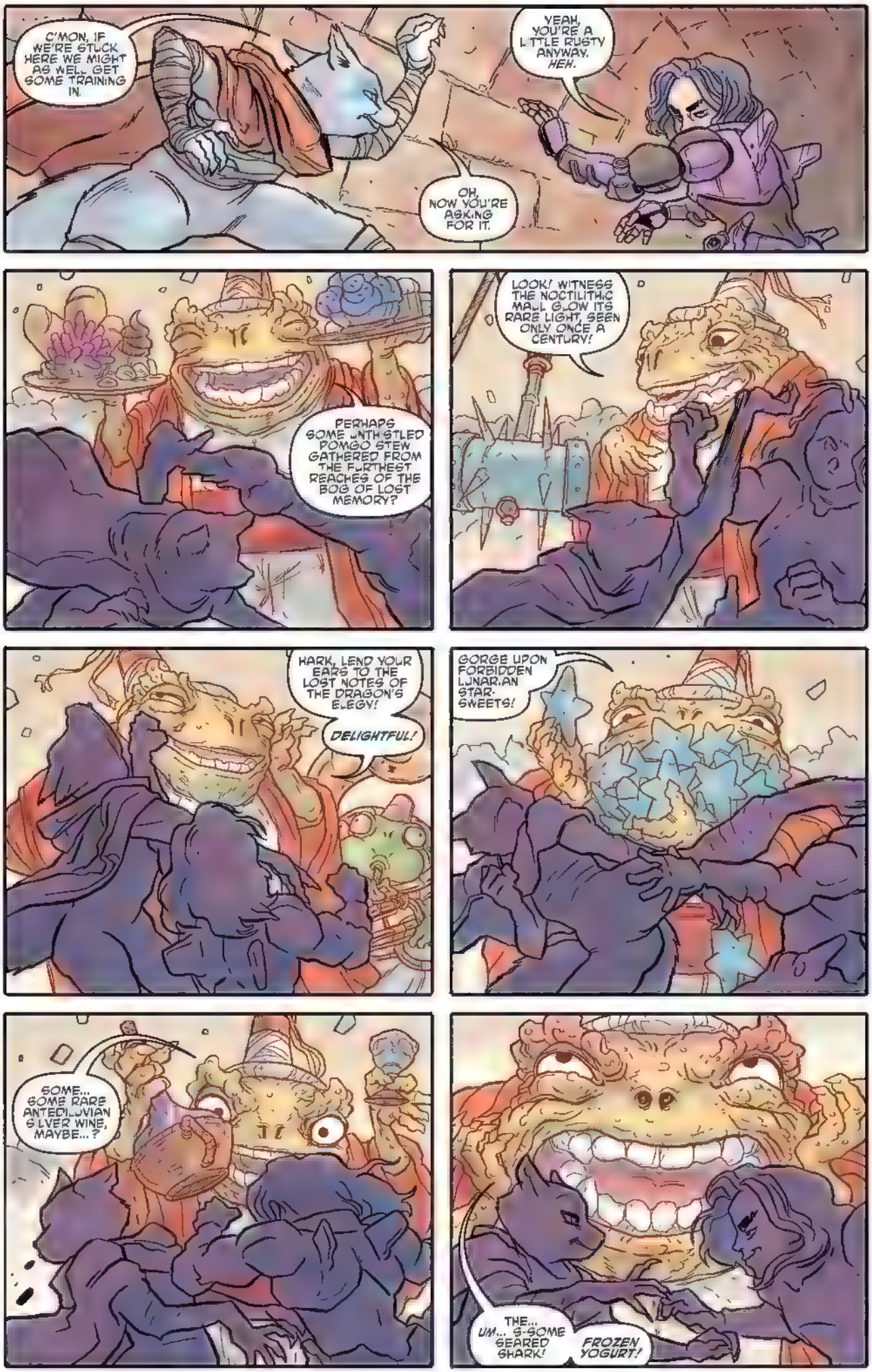
EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, THERE'S NOBODY LEFT TO TELL YOU WHO YOU HAVE TO BE.
AND NOW I HAVE YOU, TOO. MY BEST FRIEND.


YOU'RE SUCH A BADASS, YOU'RE ALWAYS SO CALM AND COOL.
NAW, THAT AIN'T ME.

INSIDE, I'M SO PISSED OFF. AT PEOPLE, AT THE WORLD, AT EVERYONE WHO DOESN'T FIGHT BACK.
I'M PISSED AT THE DRUNK DRIVER WHO TOOK MY MOM.
BEING CALM AND COLLECTED—IT'S ALL AN ACT. I JUST... WANNA HIT THE WORLD 'TIL IT MAKES SENSE. THAT'S WHY I FIGHT WITH THE TURTLES AND CASEY AND YOU.
I KEEP HOPIN' SOMEDAY I'LL HIT THE ONE THING THAT MAKES EVERYTHING RIGHT SOMEHOW.


MAYBE WE SHOULD DO WHAT WE DO BEST, THEN.
YEAH. I'VE BEEN TO ENOUGH PARTIES TO KNOW THAT THE BEST WAY TO GET THROWN OUT...
...IS TO START A FIGHT.

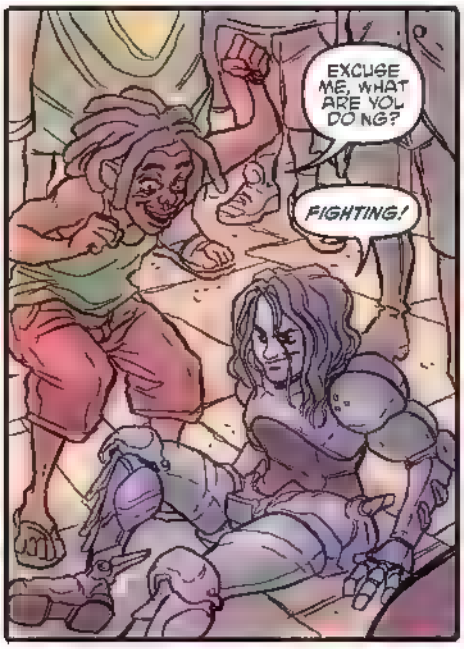
HMM. ENSURE THE IMPERIAL TRUFFILICIOUS RAINDUST HAS EXTRA FLUFF.
DO NOT FORGET A PINCH OF LUNAR AN BRICKET IN THE FLICKERING COLD GOD-ROAST. THAT'S MY SISTER JAGWAR'S FAVORITE!
BUT DO FORGET THE GREEN NOK NOK THIS TIME. PLEASE.
AND MELLIFLUOUS MELODIES MUST BE SUNG INTO THE BATTER OF THE PRISTINE ARGENT, LEST IT BECOME DRY AND BITTER!
OH, I KNOW, I'VE BEEN TO MUCH BETTER PARTIES THAN THIS.
TELL ME ABOUT IT. OUR NORMAL REGULAR LIVES BACK HOME ARE SO MUCH COOLER.
FEH, IMPOSSIBLE! YOU MORTALS ARE BUT TADPOLES IN THE REALMS OF EXPERIENCE! THERE IS NOTHING MORE COMPELLING THAN THESE WONDERS!
I DUNNO, DUDE. YOUR PARTY IS KIND OF A SNOOZE.
SNOOORRE!
SLAKE YOUR HUNGER ON ROAST HIPPOGRIFF!
BEHOLD THE PHANTASMAL FLAMES OF NAVERA!!
PLAY THE UNRELEASED LORDS OF FIGHTING 3 WITH TONY BENNETT!!!


C'MON, IF WE'RE STUCK HERE WE MIGHT AS WELL GET SOME TRAINING IN.
YEAH, YOU'RE A LITTLE RUSTY ANYWAY. HEH.
OH, NOW YOU'RE ASKING FOR IT.
PERHAPS SOME UNTHISTLED POMGO STEW GATHERED FROM THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE BOG OF LOST MEMORY?
LOOK! WITNESS THE NOCTILITHIC MALL GLOW ITS RARE LIGHT, SEEN ONLY ONCE A CENTURY!
HARK, LEND YOUR EARS TO THE LOST NOTES OF THE DRAGON'S ELEGY!
DELIGHTFUL!
GORGE UPON FORBIDDEN LUNARIAN STAR-SWEETS!
SOME... SOME RARE ANTEDILUVIAN SILVER WINE, MAYBE...?
THE... UM... S-SOME SEARED SHARK!
FROZEN YOGURT!

ANYTHING YOU DESIRE!

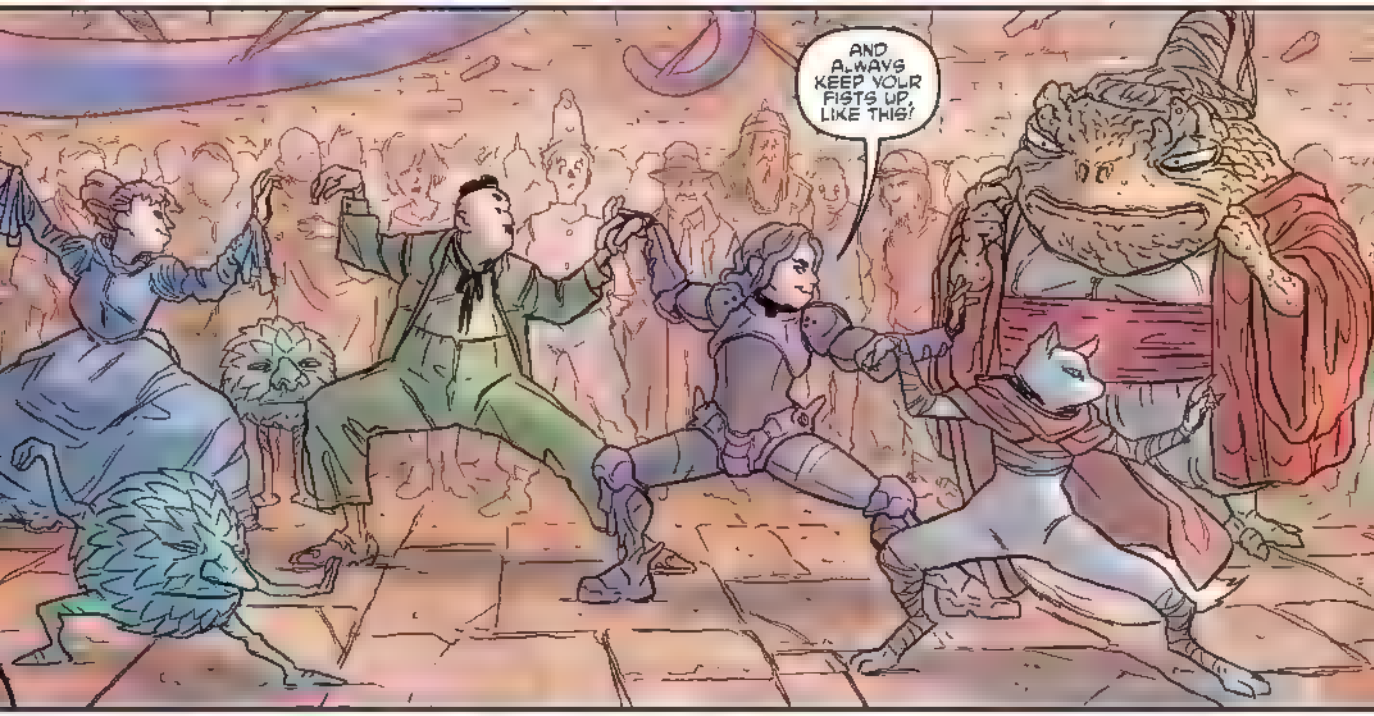
WHAT ARE THOSE TWO UP TO?
THEY SEEM TO BE ENGAGED IN SOME MANNER OF FIST-CUFFS!
HOW NOVEL!

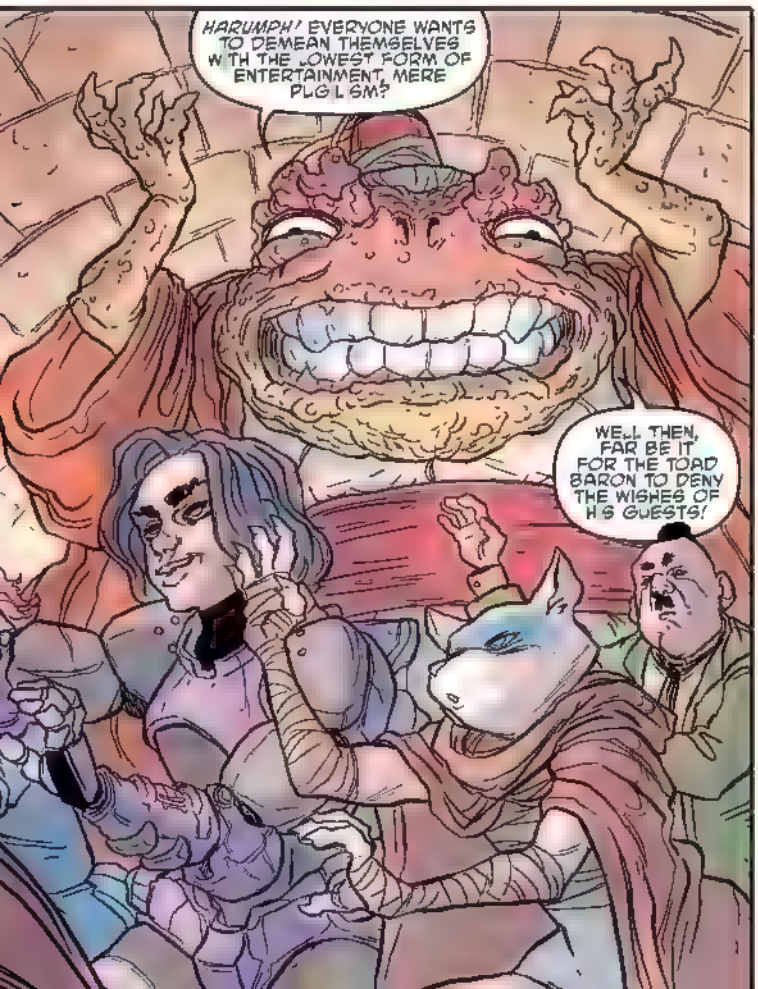
NO! DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO THEM! THEY'RE BORING!
THE DELIGHTS!
PAY ATTENT ON TO THE DELIGHTS AROUND YOU!


EXCUSE ME, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
FIGHTING!

ANYONE WANT TO JOIN US?

OKAY, YOU WANNA PLANT YOUR FEET LIKE THIS...

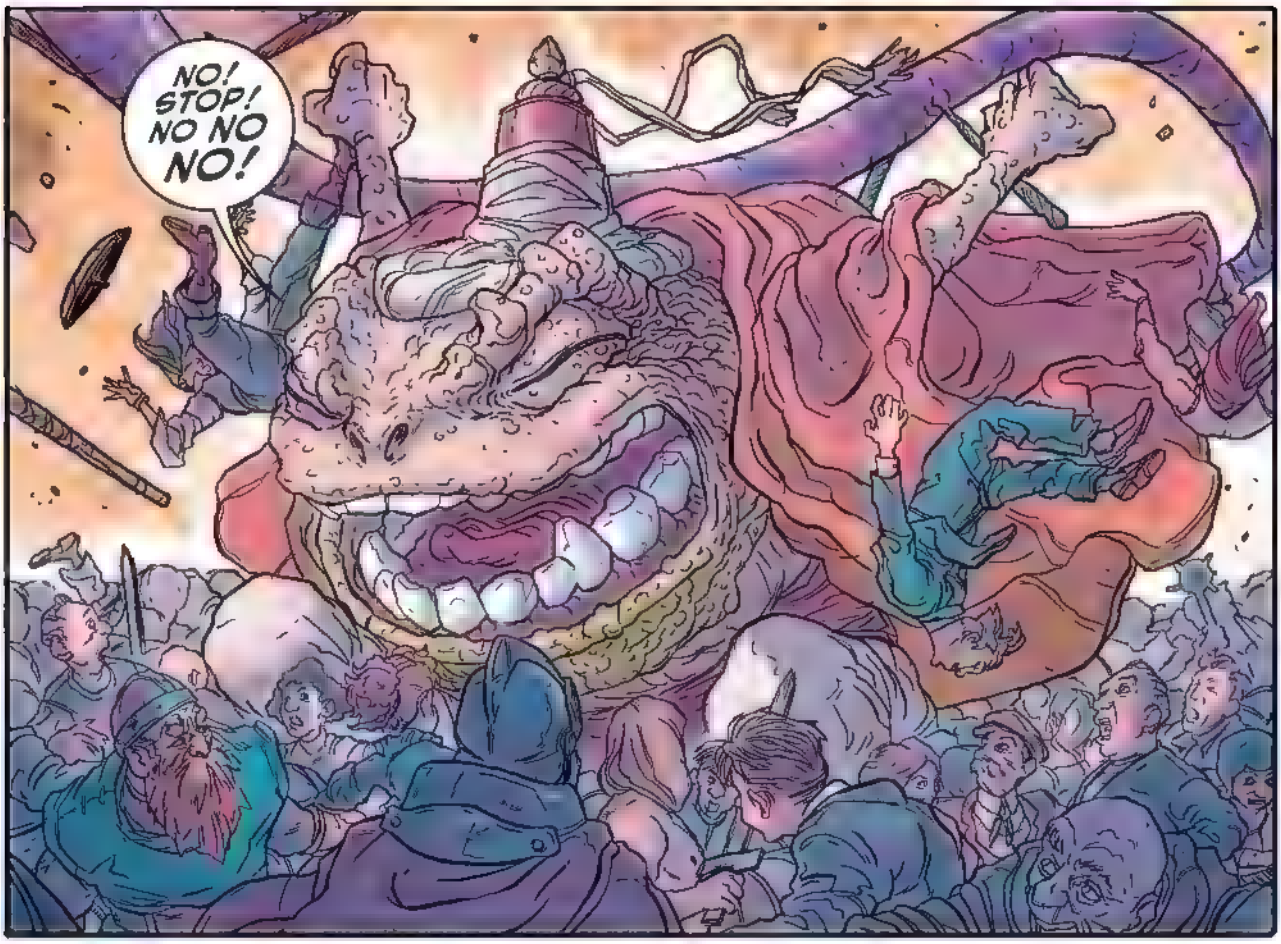

AND ALWAYS KEEP YOUR FISTS UP, LIKE THIS!

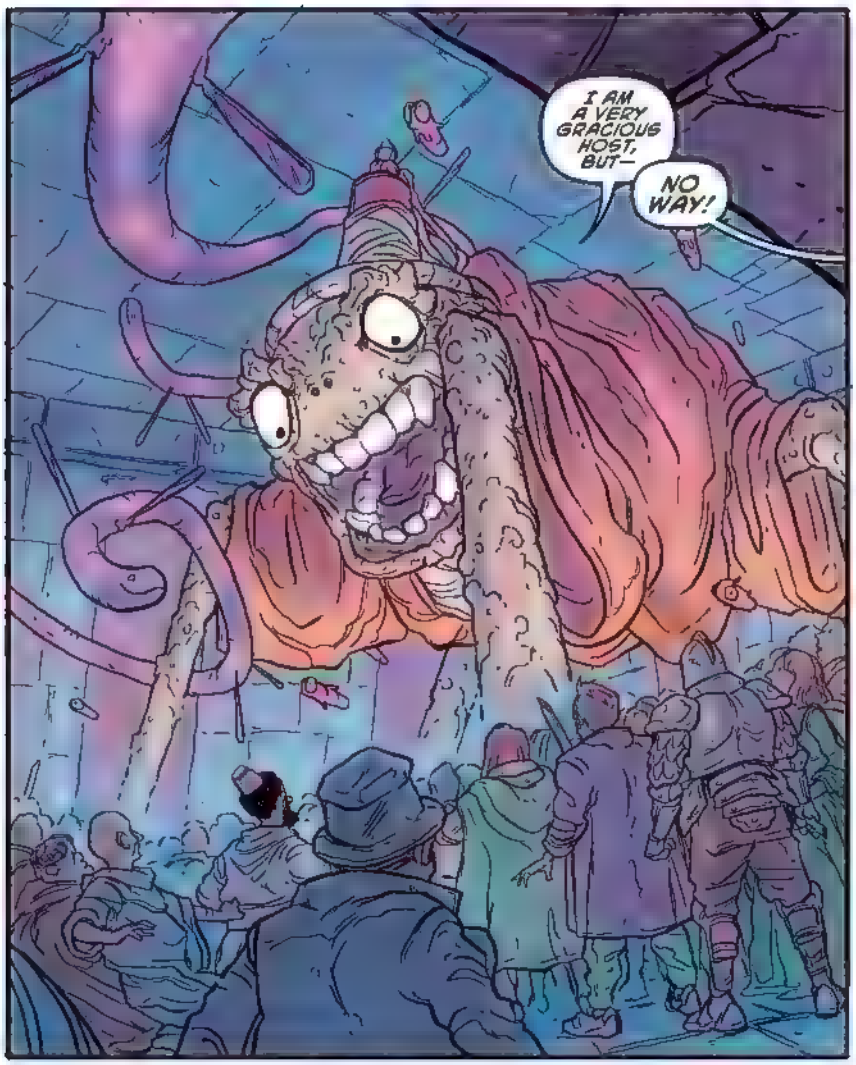

HARUMPH! EVERYONE WANTS TO DEMEAN THEMSELVES WITH THE LOWEST FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT, MERE PUGILISM?
WELL THEN, FAR BE IT FOR THE TOAD BARON TO DENY THE WISHES OF HIS GUESTS!

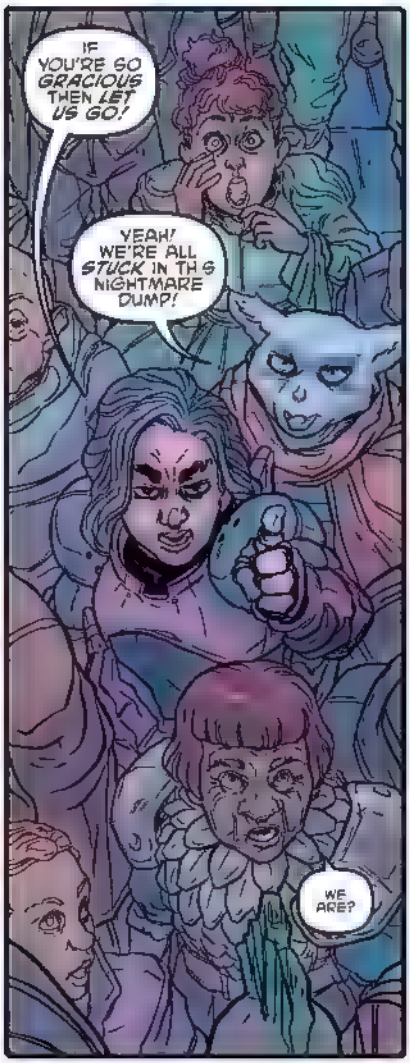
CLAP CLAP

EVERYONE, BRANDISH A WEAPON! THERE WILL BE A GRAND, ENTERTAINING BATTLE!

KRAK!
YES. I SEE. ACT LIKE BARBARIANS, THEN. VERY DROLL.
SHRRTLP
THIS IS SO FUN, YOU GUYS!
NOW LET'S WRECK THIS BEAUTIFUL STUFF OVER HERE!
YEAH! C'MON!
WOOO! YEAAAH!

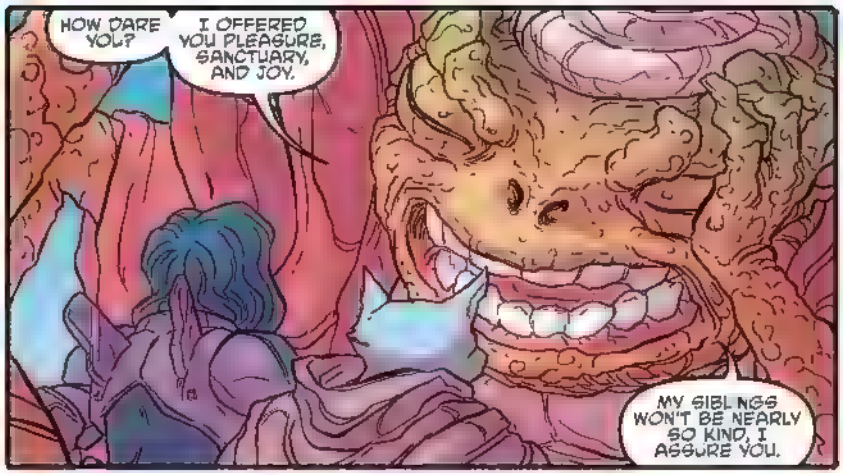

NO! STOP! NO NO NO!


I AM A VERY GRACIOUS HOST, BUT—
NO WAY!

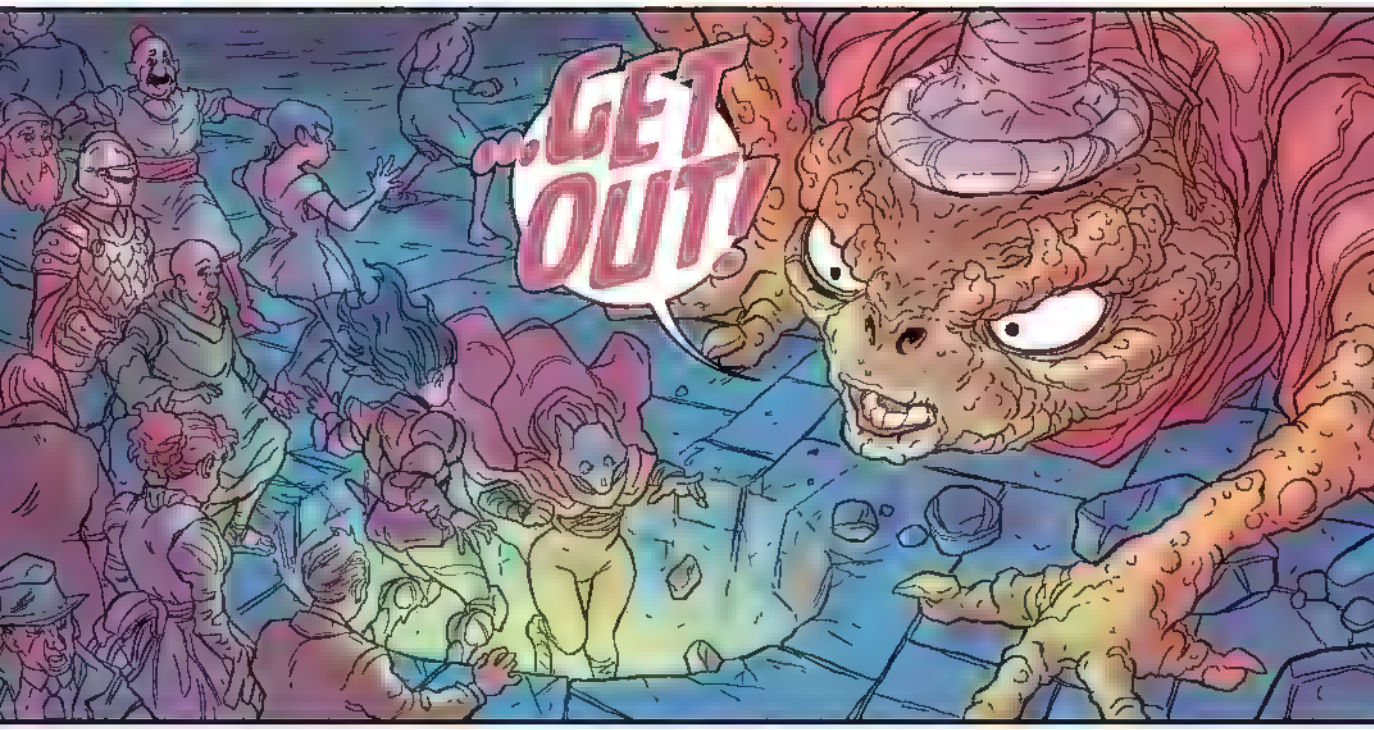

IF YOU'RE SO GRACIOUS THEN LET US GO!
YEAH! WE'RE ALL STUCK IN THIS NIGHTMARE DUMP!
WE ARE?

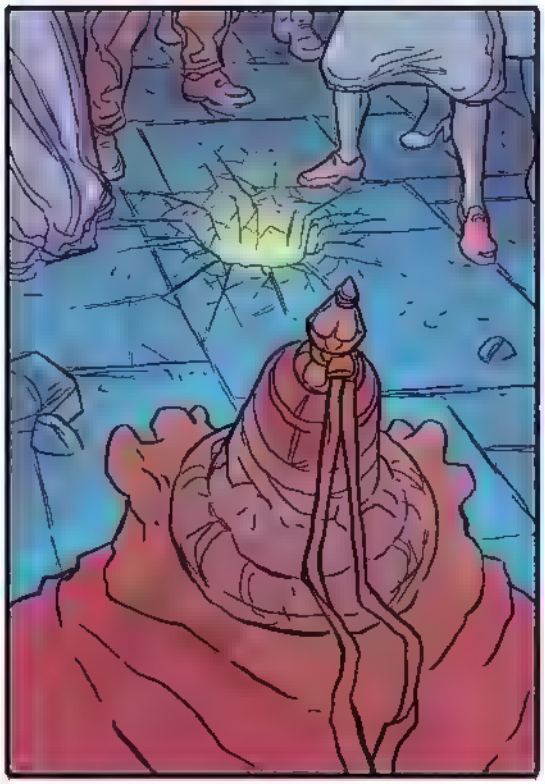
WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO *LEAVE?* I ASK YOU, WHY LEAVE ALL OF THE *WONDERFUL NEVERENDING DELIGHTS* BEHIND?
THE DELIGHTS *ARE* PRETTY GOOD...
AND YOU CAN'T EVEN *GET* IMPERIAL TRUFFLICIOUS RAINDUST BACK HOME...
IF THE DELIGHTS ARE NEVERENDING, WHY NOT SMASH 'EM?!
YEAH! THINK OF HOW MUCH FUN T'D BE TO DESTROY ALL THIS STUFF!
TOAD BARON'S GOT MORE, ANYWAY, AND HE WANTS US TO HAVE FUN!
RIGHT, TOAD BARON?
W-WELL, YES, BUT—
YOU HEARD THE B.G GUY!
SMASH!
YAAAAAAAH!

STOPPP ITT!
YOU ARE THE WORST GUESTS EVER!
I CAN TELL WHY MY SIBLINGS LIKE YOU MUTANTS AND MISFITS SO MUCH.
ALL YOU WANT IS TO FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT. JUST DREADFUL.
WE WANT OUTTA HERE!
YOU KNOW, TOADY, NOTHIN'S WORSE THAN A HOST WHO DOESN'T WANT THE PARTY TO EN

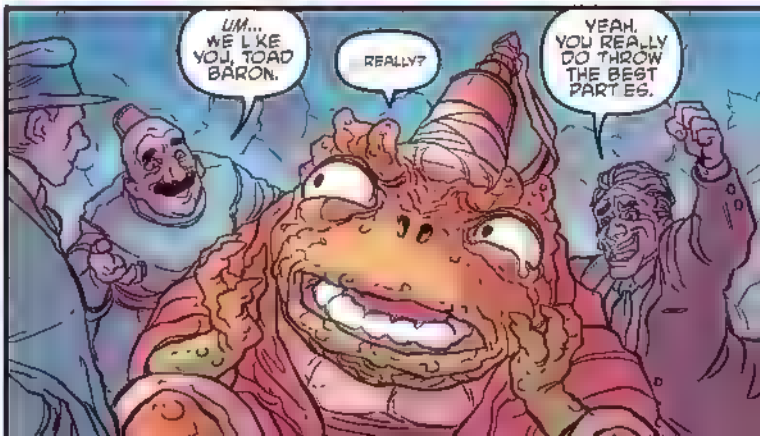

HOW DARE YOU?
I OFFERED YOU PLEASURE, SANCTUARY, AND JOY.
MY SIBLINGS WON'T BE NEARLY SO KIND, I ASSURE YOU.

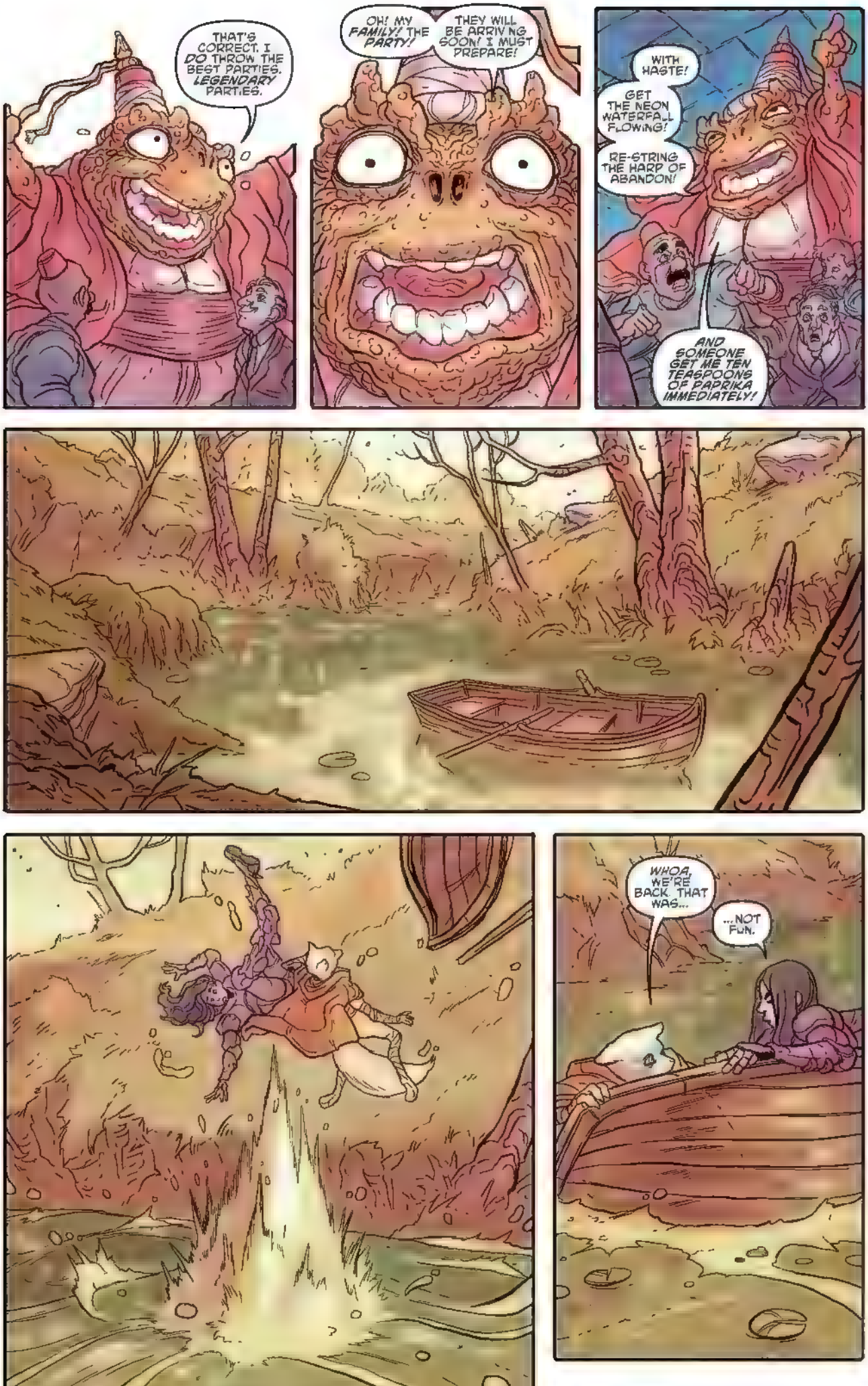
BUT NOW...


...GET OUT!

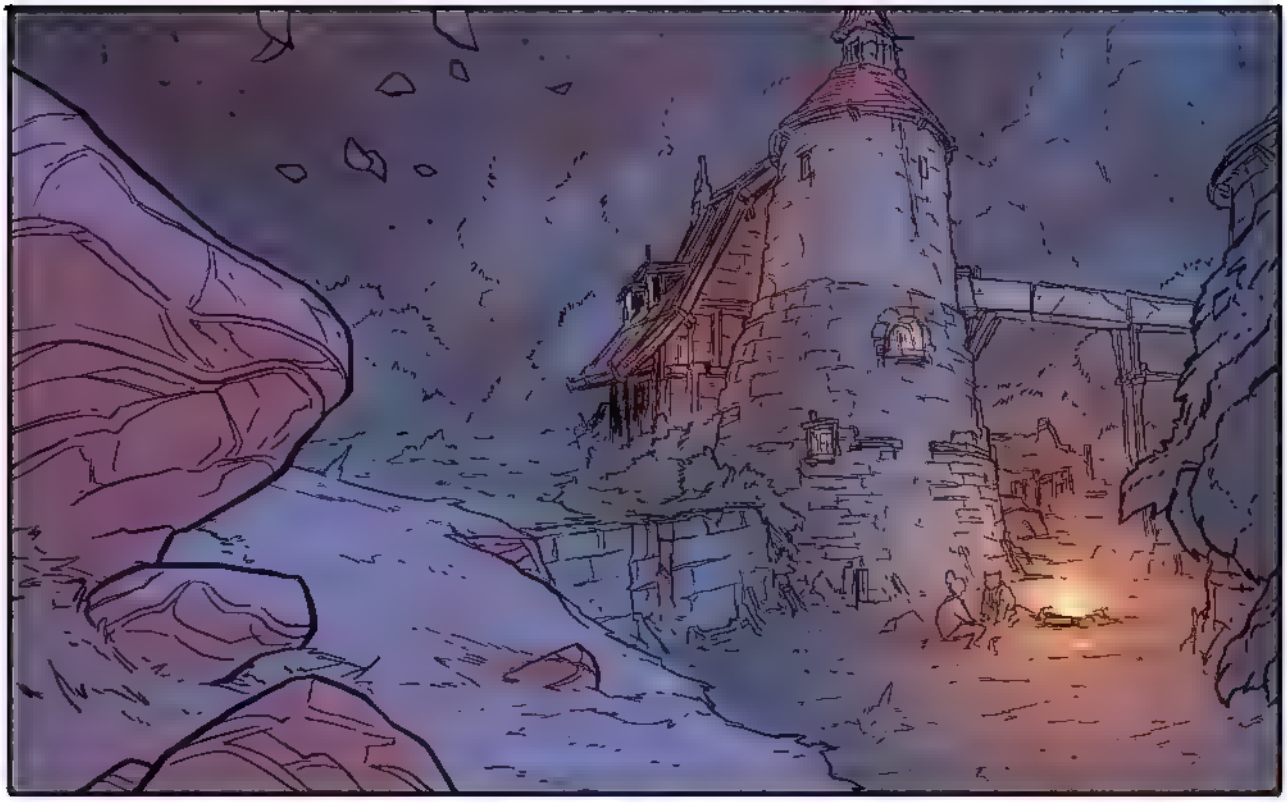


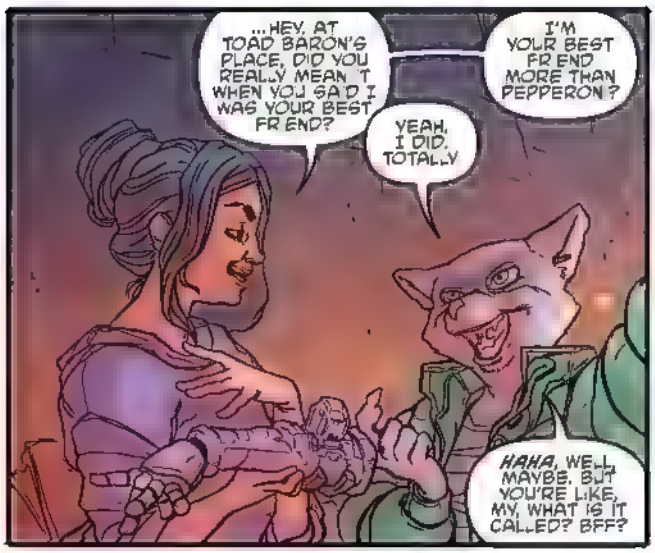
I TRIED SO HARD... WHY DIDN'T THEY LIKE ME?

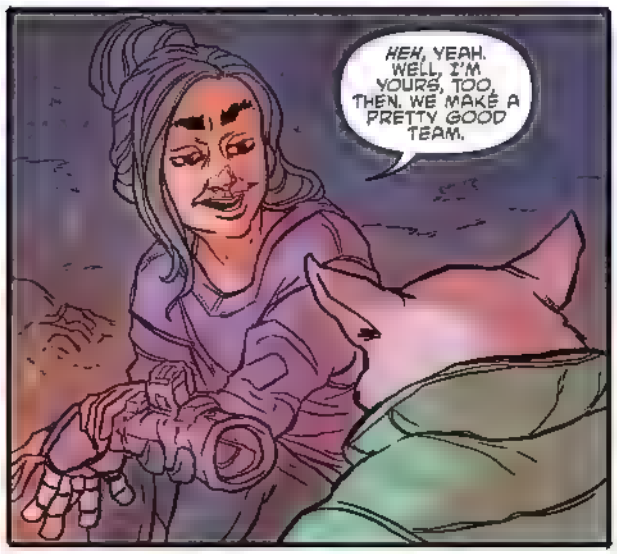

UM... WE LIKE YOU, TOAD BARON.
REALLY?
YEAH. YOU REALLY DO THROW THE BEST PARTIES.


THAT'S CORRECT. I DO THROW THE BEST PARTIES. LEGENDARY PARTIES.
OH! MY FAMILY! THE PARTY!
THEY WILL BE ARRIVING SOON! I MUST PREPARE!
WITH HASTE!
GET THE NEON WATERFALL FLOWING!
RE-STRING THE HARP OF ABANDON!
AND SOMEONE GET ME TEN TEASPOONS OF PAPRIKA IMMEDIATELY!
WHOA, WE'RE BACK. THAT WAS...
...NOT FUN.

DUDE. I NEVER WANNA GO TO ANOTHER PARTY OR SEE ANOTHER FROG AS LONG AS I LIVE.
I'M GONNA PUKE IF I SEE ANY FOOD AGAIN.
HUH. MY GAUNTLET SAYS WE WERE ONLY GONE A COUPLE HOURS.
UGH. IT FELT LIKE WEEKS.
MAYBE IT WAS, LIKE TIME WAS DIFFERENT THERE, SINCE IT WAS ANOTHER DIMENSION?
HEY UM, THANK YOU.
HUH? WHAT?
REMEMBER I SAID I MIGHT LEAVE...?
I THOUGHT I MIGHT HAVE BEEN DONE WITH EVERYTHING, BUT AFTER ALL THIS, SEEING YOU DO YOUR THING BACK IN THAT PLACE... IT WAS AWESOME.
HEH. I TOLD YOU WHY I ALWAYS FIGHT, THOUGH. IT AIN'T NOBLE OR NOTHIN'.
OH, SHUT UP.
I'M PROUD YOU'RE MY FRIEND, ANGE... I DON'T WANNA LEAVE YOU.
AW. RIGHT BACK ATCHA, SILLY FLUFFY GIRL. GIMME A HUG.




...HEY, AT TOAD BARON'S PLACE, DID YOU REALLY MEAN IT WHEN YOU SAID I WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND?
I'M YOUR BEST FRIEND MORE THAN PEPPERONI?
YEAH, I DID. TOTALLY.
HAHA, WELL, MAYBE. BUT YOU'RE LIKE, MY, WHAT IS IT CALLED? BFF?


HEH, YEAH. WELL, I'M YOURS, TOO, THEN. WE MAKE A PRETTY GOOD TEAM.

UH-OH, WHAT IS THAT?
BEEP BEEP BEEP

WHOA, CHECK THIS OUT. IT TRACKED WHERE WE WENT.
IT'S GOT THE COORDINATES FOR WHEREVER THE HELL TOAD BARON'S PLACE IS.

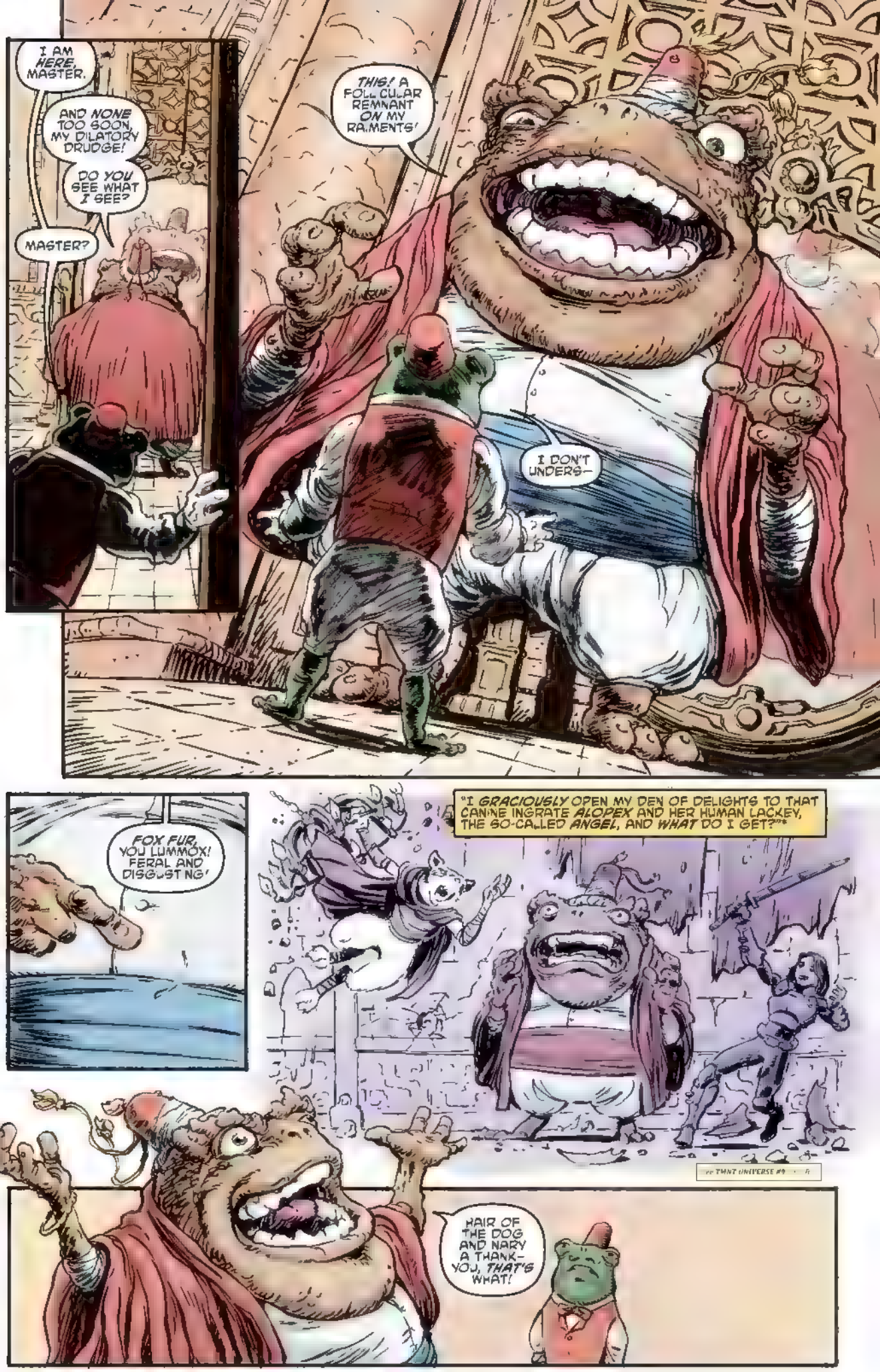
UGH, LIKE WE'D EVER WANNA GO BACK THERE.
WAIT WHAT IF WE COULD?
ARE YOU NUTS?!
NO, WAIT, SHUT UP!
TOAD BARON SAID THE OTHER PANTHEON GUYS WERE COMING TO HIS PLACE, RIGHT?
WHAT IF WE COULD LIKE, SPY ON THEM?
WHAT IF WE KNEW WHAT THEY WERE GONNA DO?
WHAT IF WE KNEW WHO ALL THE PLAYERS WERE?
I LIKE THE WAY YOU'RE THINKING...

"...TIME TO TURN THE TABLES!"

art by SOPHIE CAMPBELL

ISSUE #71

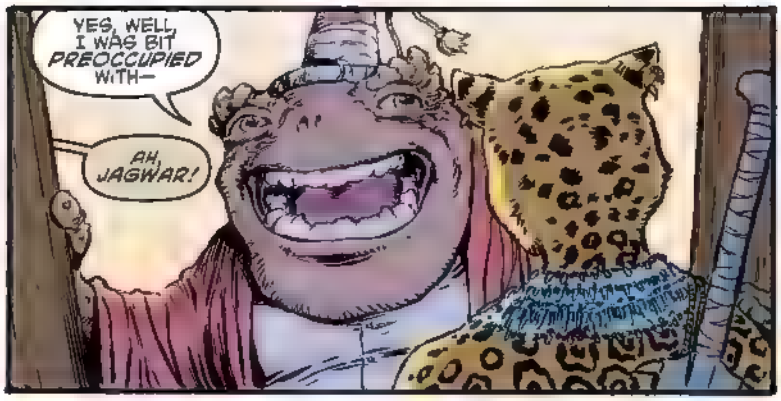
THE DEN OF DE..IGHTS.
HOME OF THE TOAD BARON
ALBERTO!
TO ME...
...NOW!

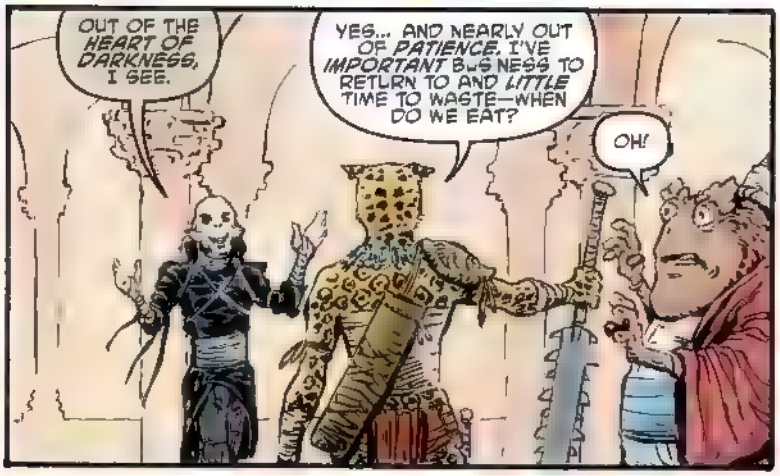

I AM HERE, MASTER.
AND NONE TOO SOON, MY DILATORY DRUDGE!
DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
MASTER?
THIS! A FOUL CULAR REMNANT ON MY RAIMENTS!
I DON'T UNDERS—
FOX FUR, YOU LUMMOX! FERAL AND DISGUST NG!
"I GRACIOUSLY OPEN MY DEN OF DELIGHTS TO THAT CANINE INGRATE ALOPEX AND HER HUMAN LACKEY, THE SO-CALLED ANGEL, AND WHAT DO I GET?"*
HAIR OF THE DOG AND NARY A THANK-YOU, THAT'S WHAT!

AH, LOOK AT ME—THROWING SUCH A CHILDISH TANTRUM BEFORE OUR ESTEEMED GUESTS ARRIVE.
THESE FAMILY REUNIONS DO SO BRING OUT THE ANIMAL IN ME. MY APOLOGIES, GOOD ALBERTO.
LINT BRUSH, PLEASE.
YES, MASTER.
VULPES LAGOPUS, INDEED MORE LIKE VULPES VULGARIS.
SPEAKING OF MY OPULENT ABODE, HOW GOES PREPARATIONS FOR MY SIBLINGS' ARRIVAL?
EXCELLENT, MASTER. THE DINING TABLE IS BRIMMING WITH A SUCCULENT VARIETY OF DELICACIES TO SATISFY ANY PALATE.
AND THE BALLROOM HAS BEEN ARRANGED IN SUCH LUXURIOUS ORDER, IT PRACTICALLY SCREAMS OF ITS BEAUTY.
AAAAGGH!
WHAT IN THRICE-DROWNED ATLANTIS WAS THAT?!
OH, DEAR.
HELP US, MASTER! THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!
HM. IT APPEARS WE HAVE RODENT "ROYALTY" IN OUR PRESENCE. AND IN DISORDERLY FASHION, AS ALWAYS.
SALVAGE SOME ORDER FROM THE CHAOS, WOULD YOU, PLEASE, GOOD ALBERTO?
OF COURSE, MASTER.
FRANZ! BOB! CEASE THIS POLTROONERY AND RETURN TO YOUR DUTIES AT ONCE! OUR GUESTS ARE ARRIVING!
Y-YES, ALBERTO.
OHHH, THEIR SLIMY TAILS... SO REPULSIVE.
REPULSIVE? HOW DROLL—

—AS IF BULBOUS EYES AND GREEN LEATHERY SKIN WERE PHYSICAL TRAITS TO BE *LAUDED*, HMM, MY PET?
HELLO, BROTHER. IT IS GOOD AS *EVER* TO SEE YOU—THOUGH, THE *INVITATION* I SENT WAS FOR ONLY *ONE*... NOT *ONE THOUSAND*.
NINE HUNDRED NINETY-NINE, ACTUALLY.
YES. I SEE.
ALTHOUGH I WISH I *HADN'T*.
BE THAT AS IT MAY, *RAT KING*, I HAVE *ONLY* ENOUGH CHAIRS FOR YOU AND THE OTHER INVITED GUESTS, SO IF YOU WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO *LEAVE* YOUR PETS...
...OR SNACKS...
...OR *WHATEVER* THEY MAY BE IN THE BALLROOM, I WOULD *CERTAINLY* BE OBLIGED.
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
OF COURSE, DEAR BROTHER. *YOUR* HOME, *YOUR* RULES.
AND *THAT* WOULD BE MY DOOR.
AND A GUEST WHO UNDERSTANDS *PROPER* ARRIVAL ETIQUETTE.
PARDON ME, PLEASE.
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
GOODNESS, LOOK *WHO* IT IS!

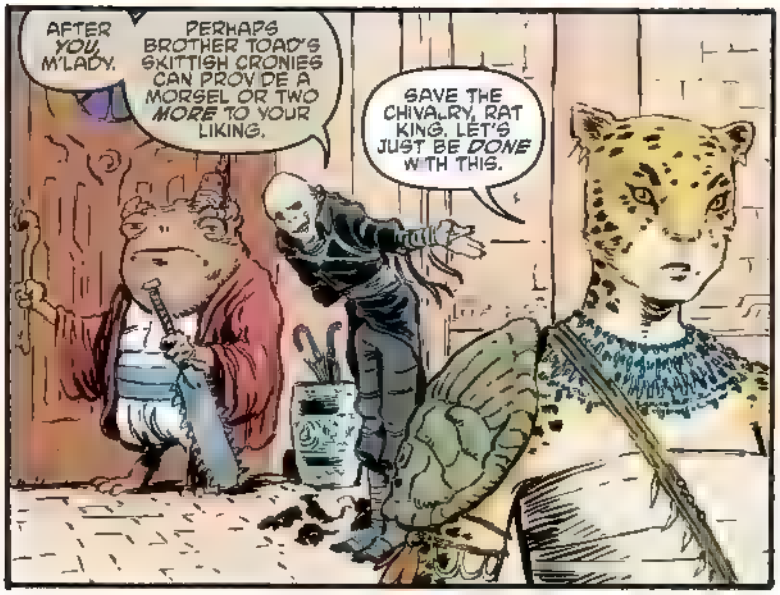
IT HAS BEEN MUCH TOO LONG, SISTER!
NOT NEARLY AS LONG AS IT TOOK FOR YOU TO ANSWER THE DOOR.


YES, WELL I WAS BIT PREOCCUPIED WITH—
AH, JAGWAR!

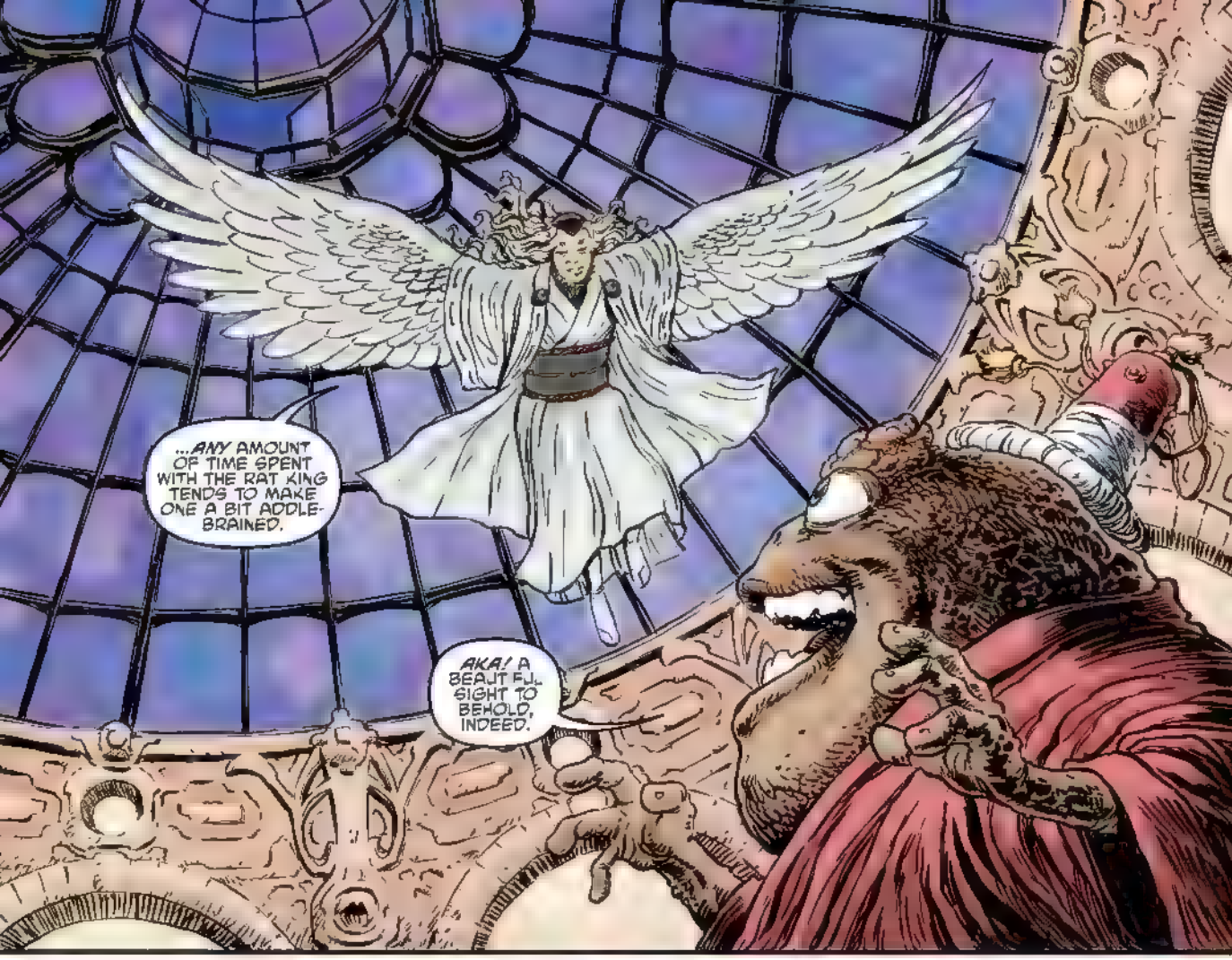

OUT OF THE HEART OF DARKNESS, I SEE.
YES... AND NEARLY OUT OF PATIENCE. I'VE IMPORTANT BUSINESS TO RETURN TO AND LITTLE TIME TO WASTE—WHEN DO WE EAT?
OH!

ALWAYS IN A RUSH, EH, LITTLE SISTER?
I'M MORE THAN HAPPY TO WHET YOUR ANXIOUS HUNGER WITH A LITTLE PRE-FEAST APPETIZER.
RIGHT I'LL PASS.

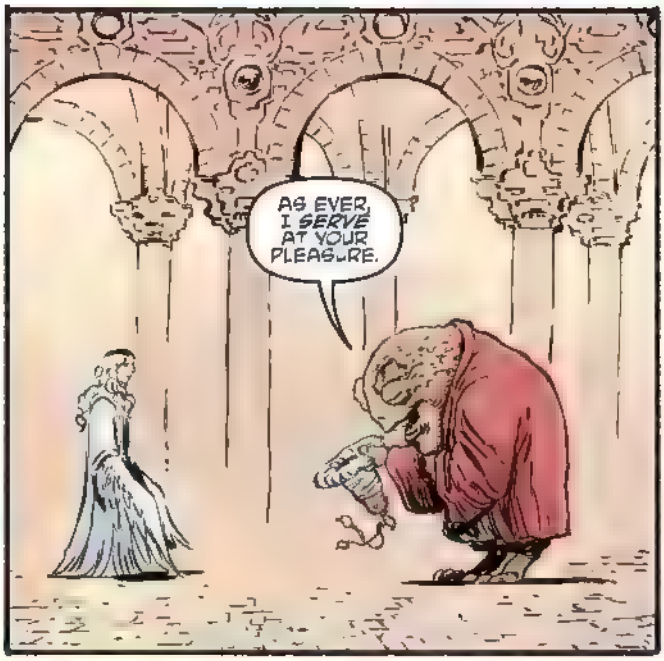
SQUEEEEK
SUIT YOURSELF.

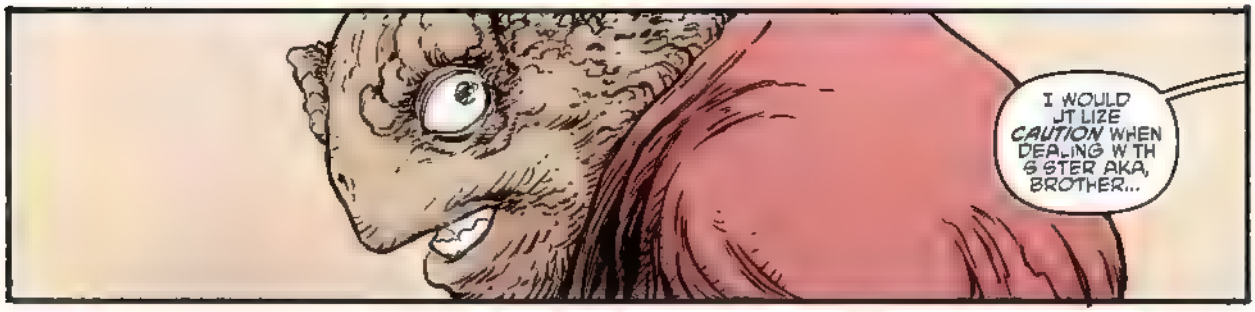

AFTER YOU, M'LADY.
PERHAPS BROTHER TOAD'S SKITTISH CRONIES CAN PROVIDE A MORSEL OR TWO MORE TO YOUR LIKING.
SAVE THE CHIVALRY, RAT KING. LET'S JUST BE DONE WITH THIS.

BUCK UP, TOAD OL' BOY... YOU CAN DO THIS.
REMEMBER— THIS MADNESS HAPPENS ONLY ONCE EVERY HUNDRED YEARS.
I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU MUST FEEL, BROTHER TOAD...


...ANY AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH THE RAT KING TENDS TO MAKE ONE A BIT ADDLE-BRAINED.
AKA! A BEAUTIFUL SIGHT TO BEHOLD, INDEED.

THANK YOU. YOU'RE TOO KIND.
NOT AT ALL, NOT AT ALL, BELOVED SISTER.
AND, PLEASE, FORGIVE MY SILLY GRUMBLING. MY DEN OF DELIGHTS IS FOR ALL TO ENJOY.


AS EVER, I SERVE AT YOUR PLEASURE.

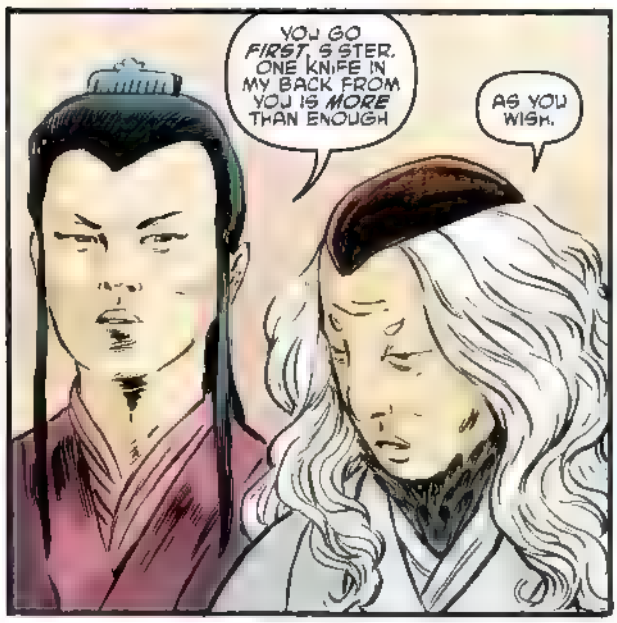

I WOULD UTILIZE CAUTION WHEN DEALING WITH SISTER AKA, BROTHER...

...LEST SHE RETURN YOUR WARM KINDNESS WITH COLD BETRAYAL.

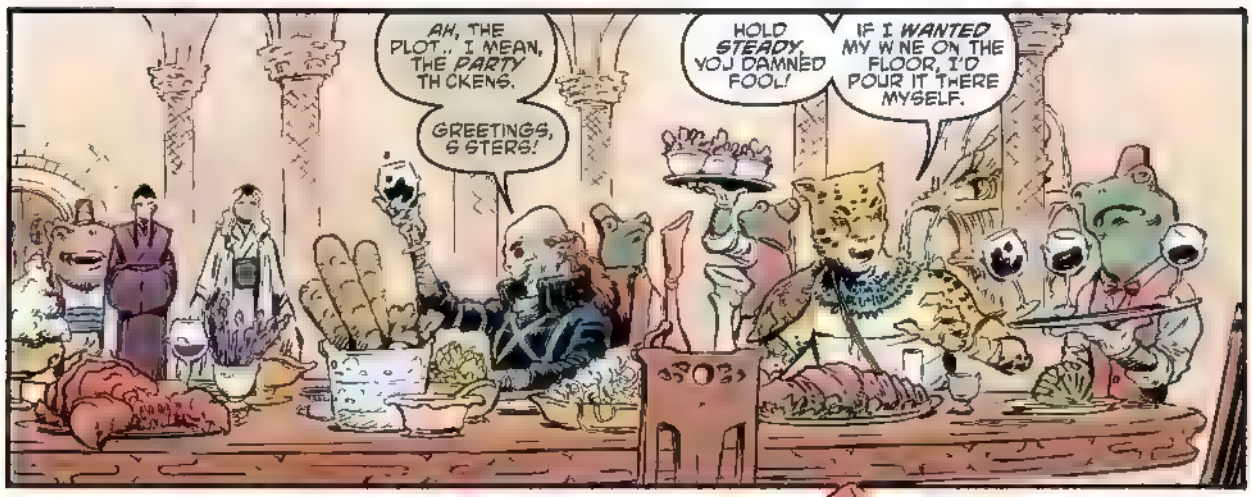
OH, KITSUNE, ARE YOU STILL ANGRY W TH ME FOR INVOLVING MYSELF IN YOUR FIGHT AGAINST HAMATO YOSH ?
INVOLVEMENT, FEH. YOUR INTERFERENCE NOT ONLY CAUSED ME TO LOSE CONTROL OF THE BATTLE, IT LED TO THE LOSS OF MY MOST IMPORTANT THRALL.
ALOPEX?
WHO ELSE?

BAH! DON'T SPEAK TO ME OF THAT INFERNAL FOX. SHE NEARLY TURNED MY DEN OF DELIGHTS INTO A DEN OF DESTRUCTION.
GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD COMPANY, I SAY.

LADIES, SHALL WE JOIN THE OTHERS?


YOU GO FIRST, S STER. ONE KNIFE IN MY BACK FROM YOU IS MORE THAN ENOUGH
AS YOU WISH.

DEEP BREATHS, TOAD. DEEP BREATHS.


AH, THE PLOT... I MEAN, THE *PARTY* THICKENS.
GREETINGS, SISTERS!
HOLD *STEADY*, YOU DAMNED FOOL!
IF I *WANTED* MY WINE ON THE FLOOR, I'D POUR IT THERE MYSELF.

PULL YOURSELF *TOGETHER*, BOB!
THIS IS THE MASTER'S FAMILY—THERE'S *NOTHING* TO...

...FEAR.
PARDON ME

BOB?
THUMP

GOTHANO, MY TENTACLED BROTHER! WHAT A SURPRISE ENTRANCE! SURREPTITIOUS AS EVER.
PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT.
ALBERTO, WHEN YOU'RE DONE DRAGGING THAT SILLY DOLT OUT OF HERE, RETURN WITH A MOP AND A BUCKET POST HASTE
RIGHT AWAY, MASTER
BROTHERS AND SISTERS, DON'T BE BASHFUL. WHILE WE AWAIT OUR SOLE REMAINING GUEST TO ARRIVE, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ENJOY THE SUMPTUOUS BOUNTY BEFORE YOU.
THE SUBLIME DELICIOUSNESS I HAVE PLANNED FOR ONE AND ALL HAS ONLY JUST BE—
—SQUEEK!
BROTHER. REALLY?
SHMP

HULLO, FAMILY.
SHNK
ONE OF YOURS, RAT KING?
FIRST RULE OF SURVIVAL— WASTE NOT, WANT NOT.
CHOMP
HM. TASTES LIKE CHICKEN.
HMPH. I COULD'VE TOLD HIM THAT.

THERE YOU ARE, BIG BROTHER! LAST TO ARRIVE BUT CERTAINLY NOT THE LEAST.
NOT BY A LONG SHOT.
PLEASE, MANMOTH, SIT.
STILL ADHERING TO THE SAME HYGIENE HABITS AS LAST TIME WE GATHERED TOGETHER, ARE YOU, BROTHER?
SOAPS AND PERFUMES FRIGHTEN AWAY PREY, AKA.
I PREFER NATURE'S MUSK.
REALLY? AND HOW'S THAT WORKING FOR YOU?
VERY WELL, WE ARE ALL PRESENT NOW EXCEPT FOR CHI-YOU.
BUT AFTER FIVE CENTURIES OF HIS ABSENCES AT THESE GATHERINGS, I SEE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THIS YEAR WILL BE ANY DIFFERENT.
UNLESS, OF COURSE, ANYONE HAS NEW INFORMATION REGARDING OUR MISSING BROTHER?
LIKE KITSUNE, PERHAPS?
ME? WHY, NO— POOR CHI-YOU'S DISAPPEARANCE REMAINS AS MUCH A TRAGIC MYSTERY TO ME AS ANYONE ELSE.
WELL, I CAN'T SPEAK FOR ANYONE ELSE, BUT I FIND YOUR SAD CONCERN TO BE INARGUABLY SINCERE, SISTER.
I MEAN, IT'S NOT AS IF HAVING CHI-YOU GONE PROVIDES YOU WITH ANY KIND OF STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE.
YES, WELL... THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF TIME TO DISCUSS AND DEBATE STRATEGY SOON ENOUGH.
BUT FIRST, GOOD ALBERTO, PLEASE BRING THIS MEETING TO OFFICIAL ORDER.
YES, MASTER.
PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME, AL.

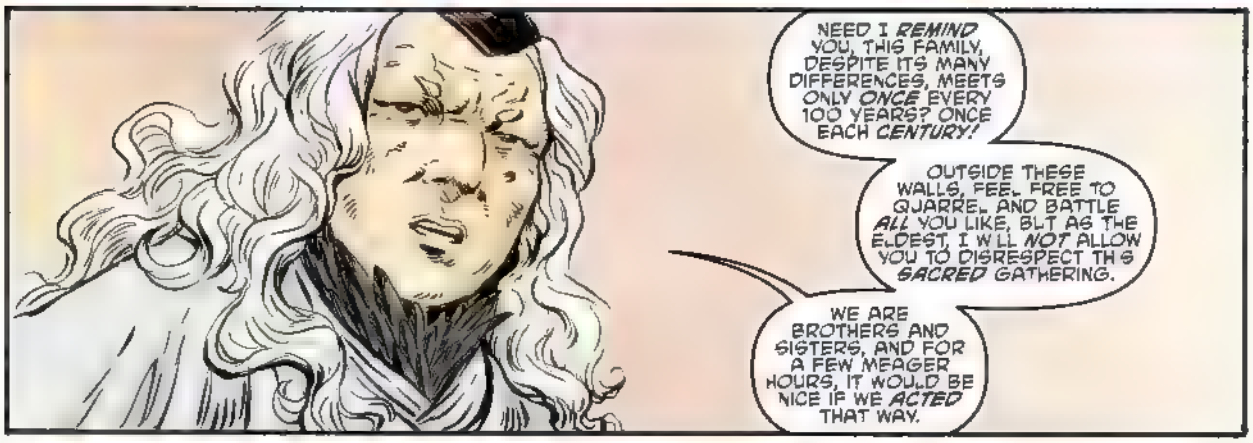
HEAR YE, HEAR YE. ALL PRESENT, THE HONORABLE TOAD BARON WELCOMES YOU TO HIS INEFFABLE DEN OF DELIGHTS FOR THE CENTENARY MEETING OF THE IMMORTAL PANTHEON. AS IN MEETINGS PAST, YOU ARE GATHERED TOGETHER TODAY TO CELEBRATE ANOTHER 100 YEARS OF FAMILY SUCCESSES, AND TO DISCUSS STRATEGIES THAT WILL ENSURE CENTURIES MORE OF THE SAME.
BUT FIRST, AS IS THE CUSTOM, FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS ARE IN ORDER ACKNOWLEDGING FROM ELDEST TO YOUNGEST. AND WITHOUT FURTHER ADO..
AKA KIND SPREADER OF WISDOM AND PURVEYOR OF UNDERSTANDING.
IT IS SO NICE TO SHARE TIME WITH YOU ALL AGAIN.
MANMOTH, SAVAGE HUNTER AND SURVIVALIST EXTRAORDINAIRE.
HMF. AS IF ANYTHING ELSE MATTERS.
GOTHANO, KEEPER OF SECRETS AND CARETAKER OF HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE
CHI-YOU, BRINGER OF ORDER AND A WARRIOR UNEQUALED
HM. CONSIDERING WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR 500 YEARS, I'M THINKING THAT LAST PART MIGHT BE UP FOR DEBATE
RAT KING!
RAT KING, SPREADER OF CHAOS AND MALICIOUS MISCHIEF.
WHAT CAN I SAY? A HOBBY IS A HOBBY.
TOAD BARON, SEEKER OF PLEASURE AND DYNAMIC DELIVERER OF THE SAME.
CHEERS!
AND YOU'LL FIND OUT HOW SWIFT IF YOU DON'T GET A MOVE ON.
JAGWAR, VALIANT SOLDIER OF STRICT HONOR AND SWIFT JUSTICE
KITSUNE, MASTER OF COSMIC TRICKERY AND MYSTICAL DECEPTION.
AND YET, I SERVE MY FAMILY HONESTLY.
AND NOW THAT THE PROPER INTRODUCTIONS HAVE BEEN CONCLUDED, LET THE FESTIVITIES BEGIN.
LONG LIVE THE PANTHEON!

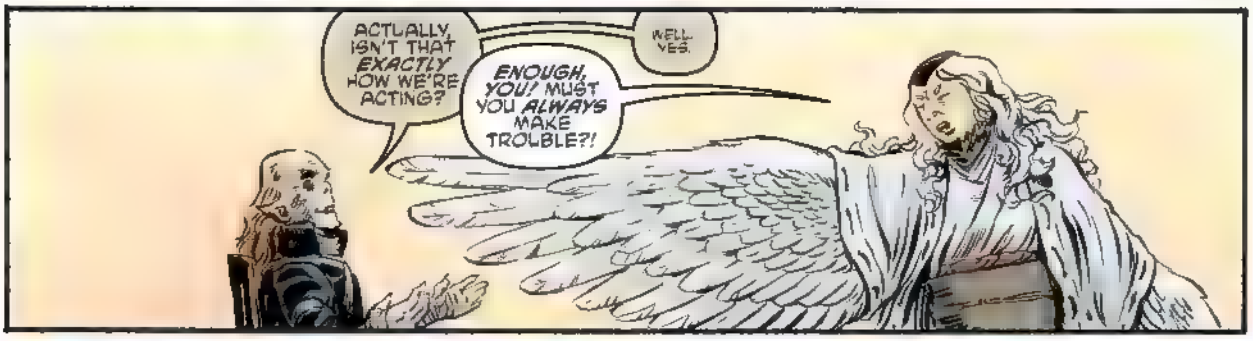
"LONG LIVE THE PANTHEON?" A BIT *REDUNDANT* CONSIDERING WE'RE IMMORTALS, NO?
TELL *THAT* TO CH-YOU.
OH, WAIT—WE CAN'T, *CAN* WE?
SN'T THAT *RIGHT*, DEAR KITSUNE?
WHY IS IT YOU CONT NUE TO LOOK TO *ME* FOR ANSWERS WHENEVER THE CONVERSATION TURNS TO CHI-YOU?
AM *I* MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?
NO, BUT WE *ALL* KNOW FULL WELL *YOU* WERE THE *LAST* TO SEE HIM.
YES, I *DON'T* DENY IT.
CHI-YOU CAME TO ME IN *ANGER* MANY YEARS AGO—UPSET BECAUSE HE BELIEVED WE WERE NOT ALL PROPERLY ADHERING TO THE *RULES* OF THE GAME.*
"I DID MY BEST TO *ASSUAGE* HIS BASELESS FURY, BUT HE STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO HEAR ME, INSTEAD STORMING AWAY AS SULLENLY AS HE'D ARRIVED."
see TMNT GHOSTBUSTERS #1
I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM *SINCE.*
SPEAKING OF YOUR SILLY GAME, WHAT ARE THESE *NEW PLAYTHINGS* I KEEP HEARING ABOUT?
THE ONES THAT HAVE THE LOT OF YOU SO AGITATED?

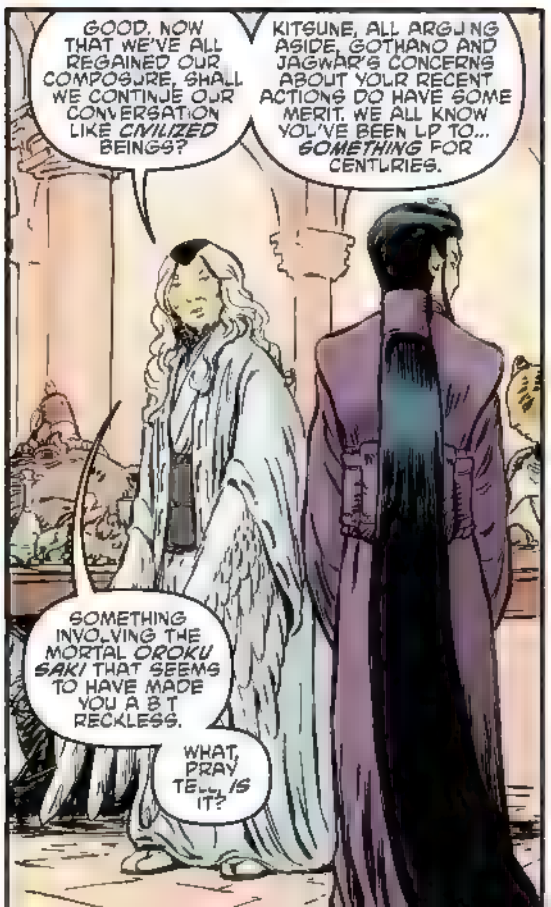
AH, YES— THE MUTANTS, AMUSING GENETIC ANOMALIES, THAT BUNCH.
SOME ARE PAWNS, SOME ARE MORE... BUT ALL ARE JUST SIMPLE GAME PIECES TO BE DISCARDED IN THE END.
OH, I DISAGREE, BROTHER. YOU GROSSLY UNDERESTIMATE THEIR ABILITIES AND THEIR WORTH.
I BELIEVE THEM TO BE THE TRUE CHILDREN OF THE PANTHEON, QUICKLY ADAPTING AND EVOLVING TO THIS NEW WORLD WE CONTINUE TO CREATE TOGETHER.
HRRM...
...TELL ME THAT WHEN THEY'VE SURVIVED THE NEXT 100 YEARS.
IN TRUTH, SURVIVAL FOR THEM MIGHT NOT BE SO OUT OF THE QUESTION, BROTHER—NOT SO LONG AS AKA CONTINUES TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE THEM AGAINST HER VERY OWN FAMILY.
ONLY TO BALANCE THE SCALES WHEN NECESSARY, CHILD.
I SEE IMMENSE VALUE IN THE MUTANTS—AS WELL AS THE HUMANS LIKE APRIL O'NEIL—AND SO I PROTECT THEM WHEN I CAN.
BUT JUST BECAUSE I ABHOR YOUR UNFAIR TACTICS, KTSUNE, IT DOES NOT MEAN I DON'T LOVE YOU.
BENEVOLENT OLD FOOL, WHEN WILL YOU EVER LEARN?
FAIRNESS PLAYS NO PART IN EITHER LOVE OR WAR.
HEAR, HEAR! AND THERE'S A THIN LINE THAT SEPARATES THEM BOTH...
...ESPECIALLY IN THE THIN PLACES.

I, TOO, TRIED MY HAND AT PLAYING WITH A MUTANT.
AS A MATTER OF FACT, I INTENDED TO PRESENT THE CREATURE AS ENTERTAINMENT THIS VERY EVENING, BUT THINGS DIDN'T QUITE TURN OUT AS I'D HOPED.
THE LITTLE BEASTY WAS UNEXPECTEDLY HARD-HEADED— ALMOST AS IF IT HAD DEVELOPED SOME SORT OF RESISTANCE TO THE MIND-CONTROL ABILITY WE ALL SHARE.
WHAT WAS THAT, O.' SILENT-BUT-DEADLY? DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?
TOO RASHLY? IS ANYONE SURPRISED? THE SPOILED BRAT'S NEVER HAD ANY DISCIPLINE.
HOW DARE YOU SPEAK OF DISCIPLINE, YOU SMALL-MINDED BUFFOON!
YOU, WHOSE MENTAL CAPACITY EXTENDS ONLY AS FAR AS THAT ABHORRENT SWORD YOU CARRY.
YOU KNOW, I CAN HAPPILY FETCH THAT SAME SWORD IF YOU'D LIKE TO DISCUSS THIS FURTHER.
AND ONCE AGAIN, THE SAVAGE PROVES MY POINT SO WONDERFULLY FOR ME.
IT'S NO WONDER YOUR INFLUENCE IS THE WEAKEST OF ALL THE PANTHEON, JAGWAR.
I'LL SHOW YOU WEAK, LITTLE SISTER.
STOP!

CEASE YOUR JUVENILE BICKERING *THIS* INSTANT!
BUT—
BUT *NOTHING!*

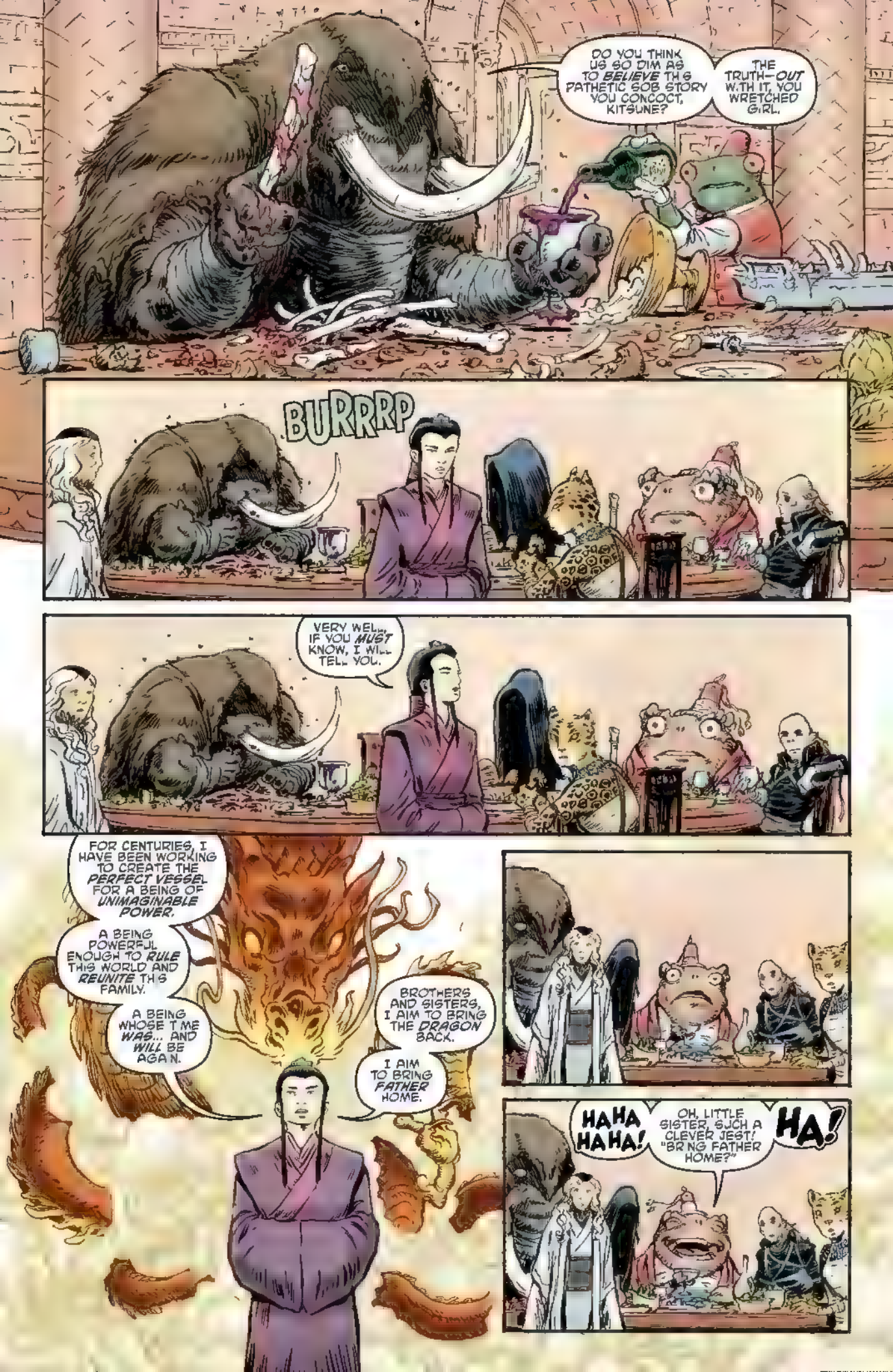

NEED I *REMIND* YOU, THIS FAMILY, DESPITE ITS MANY DIFFERENCES, MEETS ONLY *ONCE* EVERY 100 YEARS? ONCE EACH *CENTURY!*
OUTSIDE THESE WALLS, FEEL FREE TO QUARREL AND BATTLE *ALL* YOU LIKE, BUT AS THE ELDEST, I WILL *NOT* ALLOW YOU TO DISRESPECT THIS *SACRED* GATHERING.
WE ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND FOR A FEW MEAGER HOURS, IT WOULD BE NICE IF WE *ACTED* THAT WAY.


ACTUALLY, ISN'T THAT *EXACTLY* HOW WE'RE ACTING?
WELL, YES.
ENOUGH, YOU! MUST YOU *ALWAYS* MAKE TROUBLE?!


GOOD. NOW THAT WE'VE ALL REGAINED OUR COMPOSURE, SHALL WE CONTINUE OUR CONVERSATION LIKE *CIVILIZED* BEINGS?
KITSUNE, ALL ARGUING ASIDE, GOTHANO AND JAGWAR'S CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR RECENT ACTIONS DO HAVE SOME MERIT. WE ALL KNOW YOU'VE BEEN UP TO... *SOMETHING* FOR CENTURIES.
SOMETHING INVOLVING THE MORTAL *OROKU SAKI* THAT SEEMS TO HAVE MADE YOU A BIT RECKLESS.
WHAT, PRAY TELL, *IS* IT?

I... THAT IS...
...*NOTHING*, SISTER. IT IS NOTHING.
SAKI IS *DEAD*. GONE.

WHATEVER PLANS I MAY HAVE HAD ARE GONE *WITH* HIM.
LIES!


DO YOU THINK US SO DIM AS TO *BELIEVE* THIS PATHETIC SOB STORY YOU CONCOCT, KITSUNE?
THE TRUTH—*OUT* WITH IT, YOU WRETCHED GIRL.
BURRRP
VERY WELL. IF YOU *MUST* KNOW, I WILL TELL YOU.
FOR CENTURIES, I HAVE BEEN WORKING TO CREATE THE *PERFECT VESSEL* FOR A BEING OF *UNIMAGINABLE POWER.*
A BEING POWERFUL ENOUGH TO *RULE* THIS WORLD AND *REUNITE* THIS FAMILY.
A BEING WHOSE TIME *WAS*... AND *WILL* BE AGAIN.
BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I AIM TO BRING THE *DRAGON* BACK.
I AIM TO BRING *FATHER* HOME.
HAHA HAHA!
OH, LITTLE SISTER, SUCH A CLEVER JEST! "BRING FATHER HOME?"
HA!

BUT... I DO NOT JEST, BROTHER TOAD! THIS IS MY TRUE PLAN!
AS THE YOUNGEST, I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DISMISSED BY THE REST OF YOU—THE LITTLE WITCH GIRL WITH HER "CLEVER TRICKS" AND HER "PRECIOUS SPELLS." MY POWERS HAVE NEVER EARNED YOUR RESPECT, AND I HAVE HAD TO RESORT TO OBFUSCATION AND CUNNING TO PROTECT MYSELF.
BUT I GROW WEARY OF THE STATUS QUO WE CREATE FOR OURSELVES. WE ARGUE AND FIGHT, AND EACH PASSING CENTURY THIS WORLD BECOMES LESS AND LESS OURS. I DESIRE FOR US TO BE A FAMILY AGAIN.
AND WHEN FATHER RETURNS, WE CAN BECOME THAT AGAIN—JUST US! HE WILL BURN HUMANITY AWAY FROM THE FACE OF THIS WORLD AND WE WILL NO LONGER HAVE A REASON TO QUARREL.
WE CAN JUST BE US...

...JUST AS IT USED TO BE.
HAVE YOU GONE MAD? NO HUMAN MORTAL COULD CONTAIN THE DRAGON'S SPIRIT.

MY WARRIOR IS NO MERE MORTAL, JAGWAR—NOT AFTER WHAT I HAVE DONE TO HIM.
NONSENSE! THE DRAGON IS MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE IN YOUR WILDEST NIGHTMARES, GIRL. HE IS NOT TO BE TESTED!

WHY SO ANIMATED, BROTHER? DOES FATHER FRIGHTEN EVEN THE MIGHTY MANMOTH?
BUT... BUT FATHER HATED PARTIES. HE NEVER ALLOWED ANY FUN.

WELL, I'M CERTAINLY HAVING FUN!
NOTHING LIKE A FAMILY PARTY TO STIR THINGS UP, HEY, BROTHER?
OH, NO. OUCH.

IT'S ON MY HEAD!
WHAT'S THIS?

LEVITATING RATS?
NOW THERE'S TWO OF 'EM!
QUIET! THEY'LL HEAR YOU!
HAVE YOU LEARNED A CLEVER NEW TRICK WITHOUT ME, MY PETS?
UH-OH.
OR...
NICE GO'N', MIKE.
HEH. YEAH...
...MY BAD.

art by KEVIN EASTMAN
colors by TOMI VARRA

ISSUE #72

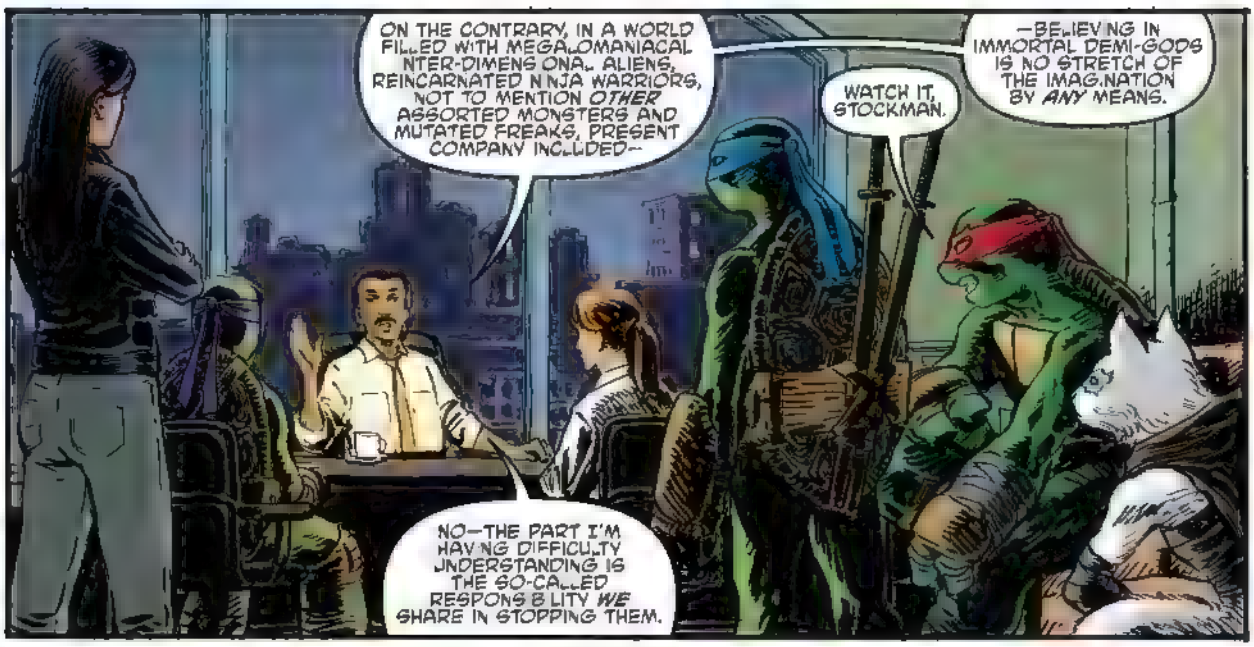
art by DAVE WACHTER

NOW.
UH, HEY, DUDES AND DUDETTES, I—
—EW, EW, EW—
—I THINK THESE LITTLE GUYS BELONG TO YOU.
SORRY FOR CRASHIN' YOUR PANTHEON PARTY.

BEFORE
LET ME MAKE CERTAIN I HAVE THIS STRAIGHT—

—YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT THERE'S A GROUP OF SHAPE-SHIFTING, MIND-CONTROLLING... IMMORTALS, WHO HAVE BEEN PULLING THE STRINGS OF HUMANITY SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME, PLAYING SOME SORT OF DEMENTED GAME...
...AND THAT IT'S OUR JOB TO THWART THEIR EFFORTS?

UM, YEAH... MORE OR LESS, DR. STOCKMAN.
KINDA HARD TO BELIEVE, HUH?

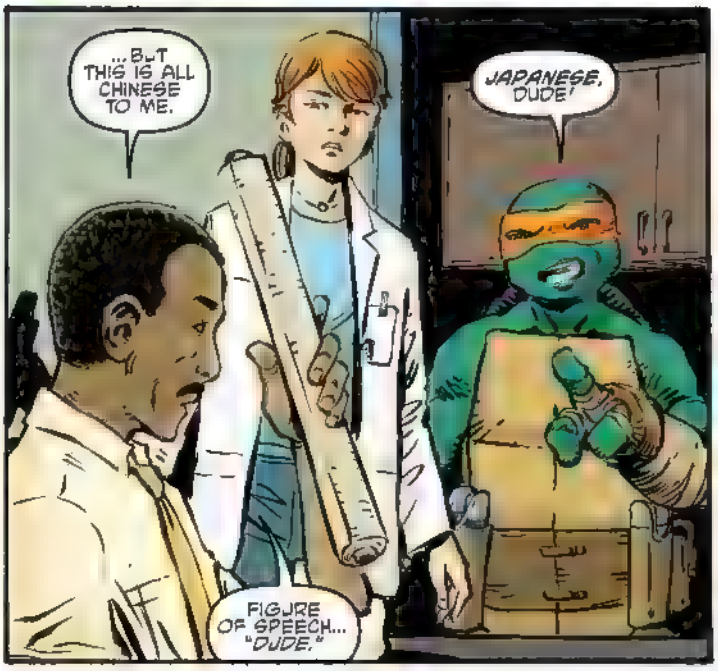

ON THE CONTRARY, IN A WORLD FILLED WITH MEGALOMANIACAL INTER-DIMENSIONAL ALIENS, REINCARNATED NINJA WARRIORS, NOT TO MENTION OTHER ASSORTED MONSTERS AND MUTATED FREAKS, PRESENT COMPANY INCLUDED--
--BELIEVING IN IMMORTAL DEMI-GODS IS NO STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION BY ANY MEANS.
WATCH IT, STOCKMAN.
NO--THE PART I'M HAVING DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING IS THE SO-CALLED RESPONSIBILITY WE SHARE IN STOPPING THEM.

QUITE FRANKLY, I FAIL TO SEE WHY I SHOULD GIVE A SINGLE DAMN.
WHAT HAS ANY OF THIS TO DO WITH ME?

YOU SELFISH LITTLE--
HOLD ON, RAPH. LET APRIL TALK.

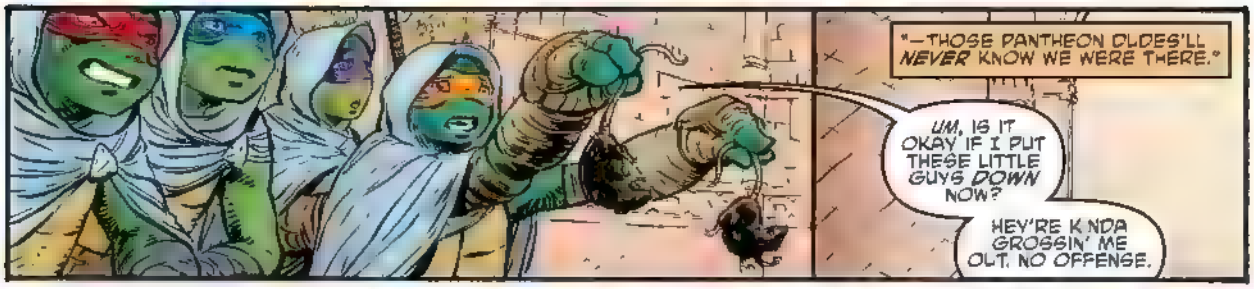
IT'S ALL RIGHT HERE, DOCTOR, IN THIS SCROLL WE RECOVERED FROM THE FOOT CLAN'S ARCHIVES.
IT DETAILS HOW THE PANTHEON'S LITTLE COMPETITION AGAINST EACH OTHER COULD HAVE HUGE RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE SURVIVAL OF HUMANITY.
WHICH AFFECTS YOU JUST AS MUCH AS ANYONE ELSE ON THIS PLANET.

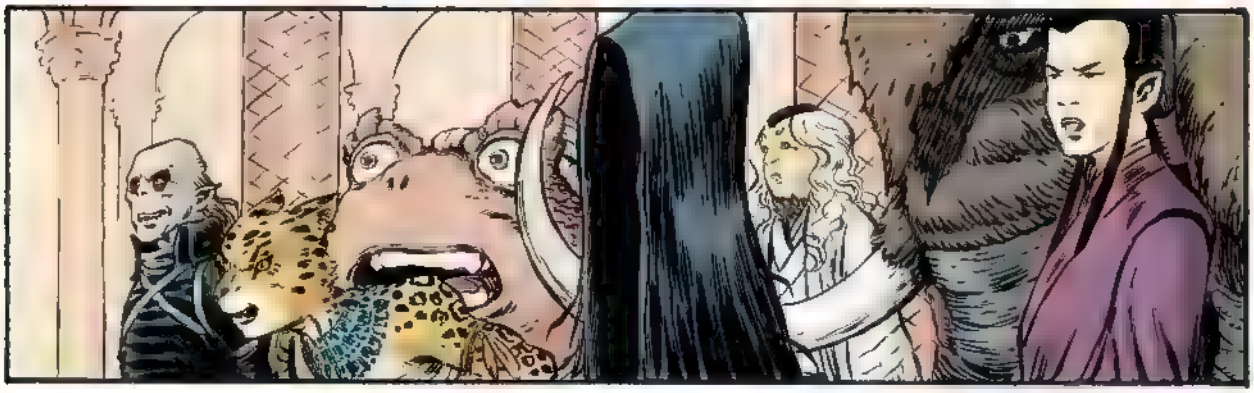
HM. SO YOU SAY, MISS O'NEIL...

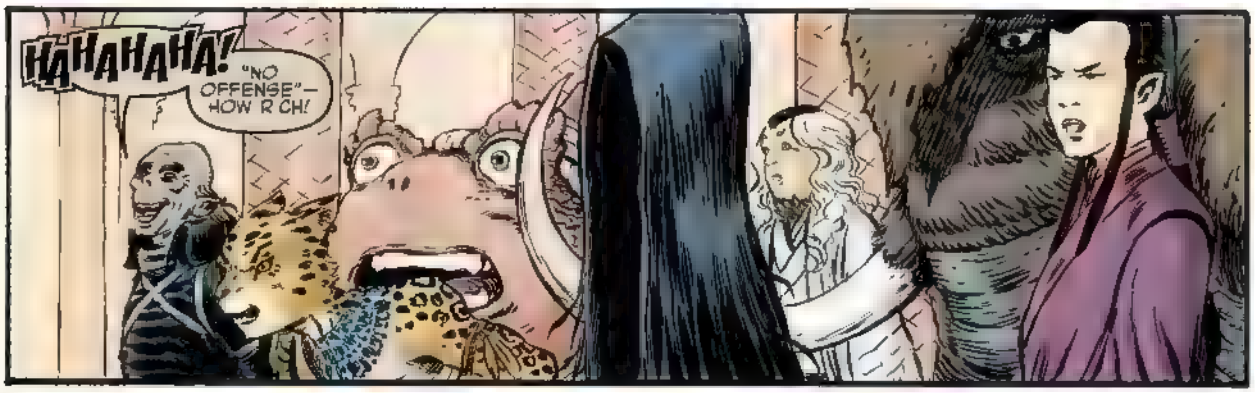

...BUT THIS IS ALL CHINESE TO ME.
JAPANESE, DUDE!
FIGURE OF SPEECH... "DUDE."

SO, ANOTHER END-OF-HUMANKIND SCENARIO, IS IT? YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE MY FAILURE TO QUAKE IN MY SHOES.
AS I'M SURE YOU RECALL, THE PREVIOUS CULPRIT INTENT ON WIPING US ALL OUT ENDED UP LOSING FAR MORE THAN HE HAD HOPED TO GAIN—HIS FREEDOM, TO BE EXACT.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS SO-CALLED PANTHEON WILL BE ANY MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN THAT MISFIT KRANG WAS?
WE DON'T KNOW. BUT THE FACT THAT THEY'VE BEEN ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY OPERATE BEHIND THE SCENES FOR SO LONG MAKES THEM A THREAT WE CAN'T IGNORE.
PLUS, THEY'VE DEMONSTRATED STRONG INTEREST IN MUTANTS, WHICH MEANS THEY'LL ALSO BE INTERESTED IN YOU BEFORE LONG, DR STOCKMAN, CONSIDERING YOUR EXCLUSIVE KNOWLEDGE OF MUTATION SCIENCE.
TALK ABOUT YOUR USUAL SUSPECTS.
AND IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THAT SAME EXCLUSIVITY COULD POTENTIALLY BE VERY PROFITABLE FOR TCRI IF YOU PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT, DOCTOR.
I'M GUESSING THE FIRST COMPANY TO DIP THEIR TOES INTO THE PANTHEON'S UNDISCOVERED SCIENTIFIC WATERS IS SETTING ITSELF UP FOR A HUGE PAYDAY DOWN THE LINE
SICK CASH, BRO. MUCHO DINERO.
HM. THIS IS ALL VERY INTRIGUING, I WON'T DENY IT.
BUT HOW DO WE FIND THESE DEMI-GODS TO BEGIN WITH? ONE DOESN'T EXIST IN SECRET FOR MILLENNIA IF ONE DOESN'T EXCEL AT REMAINING WELL HIDDEN.
WE CAN HELP WITH THAT—
—ME AND ALOPEX FOUND OUT WHERE THEY'RE ALL GONNA MEET UP SOON
YEAH. THE HARD WAY.*
* TMNT Universe #9 & #10

ONE OF 'EM TRIED TO K.DNAP JS--TRIPPY DUDE CALLED THE TOAD BARON. GUY'S HOUSE S LIKE SOMETHIN' STRA.GHT OUTTA ALICE IN WONDERLAND.
HE CALLED IT THE DEN OF DELIGHTS. MORE LKE THE DEN OF DELIRU M.
YEAH. AND WE BARELY GOT AWAY, BUT NOT BEFORE WE LEARNED ABOUT SOME WE RD FAMILY REUNION THEY GOT COMIN' UP AT THE TOAD'S CRIB
AND NOT BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO JACK THE COORD NATES TO THE PLACE IT'S ALL ON TH.S DRIVE.
I'M THINKIN', IF WE CAN BREAK IN THERE, MAYBE WE CAN GET THE INTEL WE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO STOP 'EM.
YES, YOU WOULD THINK.
BUT HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO INFILTRATE THIS "DEN OF DELIGHTS" WITHOUT BE NG DETECTED?
EASY. TELEPORTATION AND CLOAKING TECHNOLOGY.
THANKS TO HAROLD L JA AND THE STREET PHANTOMS, WE HAVE ALL THE TOOLS WE NEED TO GET IN AND OUT OF TOAD BARON'S HOUSE UNSEEN.
ALL WE NEED FROM YOU IS HELP FROM THIS SIDE WITH THE TELEPORTAT ON AND COMMUNICAT ON OPERATIONS WHILE WE'RE THERE.
I CAN G VE YOU A QUICK PR MER ON HOW TO RUN IT ALL--HARO.D DID A GREAT JOB OF MAKING IT UNCOMPLICATED, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.
AND WE STILL HAVE FULL ACCESS TO HIS OLD LABS.
AH, YES, MR L JA. I KNEW OUR PATHS WOULD CROSS AGA.N..
FINE. I'LL COOPERATE WITH THIS MADNESS... FOR NOW. BUT LET ME BE COMPLETELY FRANK ABOUT ONE THING.
I AM MORE THAN A LITTLE DOUBTFUL THAT YOU W LL BE ABLE TO PULL TH S OFF WITHOUT BEING EXPOSED.
IF I'M R GHT--AND I GO OFTEN AM--YOU MAY VERY WELL F ND YOURSELF ON YOUR OWN FROM THAT POINT.
ARE WE CLEAR?
QUIT WORRYIN' SO MUCH, DOC. WE'RE NINJAS, REMEMBER?
SNEAKIN' AROUND IS LIKE TOTALLY OUR MIDDLE NAME--

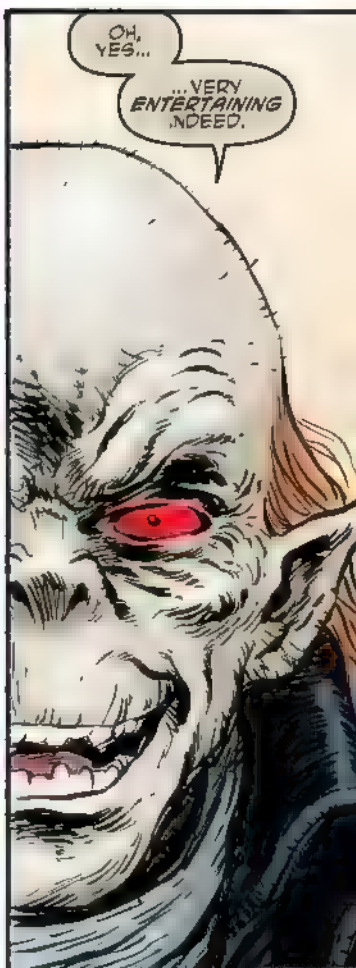

"—THOSE PANTHEON DUDES'LL NEVER KNOW WE WERE THERE."
UM, IS IT OKAY IF I PUT THESE LITTLE GUYS DOWN NOW?
HEY'RE KINDA GROSSIN' ME OUT. NO OFFENSE.



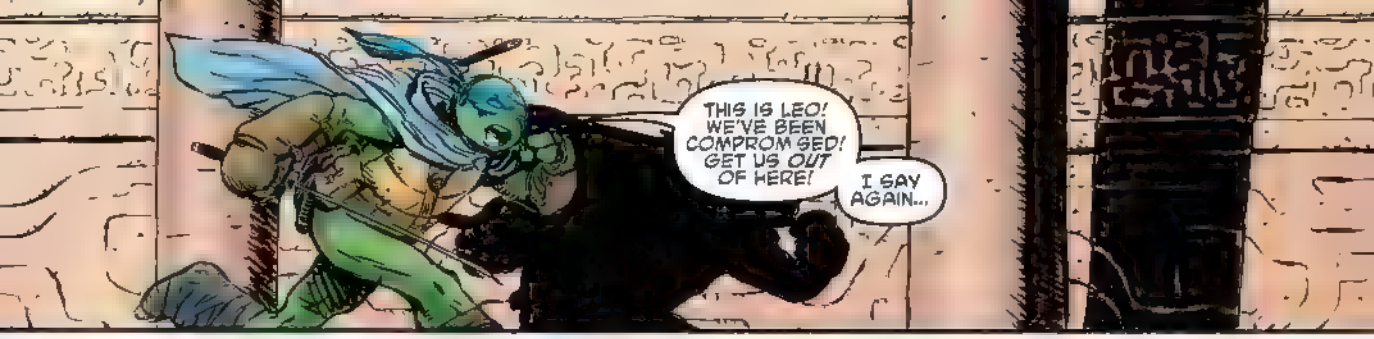

HAHAHAHA!
"NO OFFENSE"—HOW RICH!

NO OFFENSE TAKEN AT ALL, MY YOUNG MUTANT. NONE WHATSOEVER.
ON THE CONTRARY, I FOR ONE AM ECSTATIC TO SEE YOU HERE—I WAS WORRIED THE SOLE DIVERSION FOR THE EVENING WAS GOING TO BE KITSUNE'S JUVENILE HISTRIONICS
HOW HAPPY I AM TO BE PROVEN WRONG!

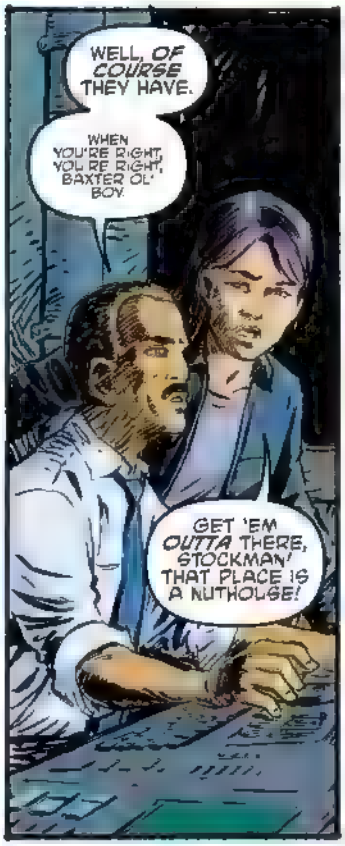
YOU'VE REALLY OUTDONE YOURSELF THIS TIME, BROTHER TOAD!
SUCH FINE PARTY FAVORS!
UM, YES... WELL... ONLY THE VERY BEST ENTERTAINMENTS WILL DO FOR MY BELOVED FAMILY.
HWAK

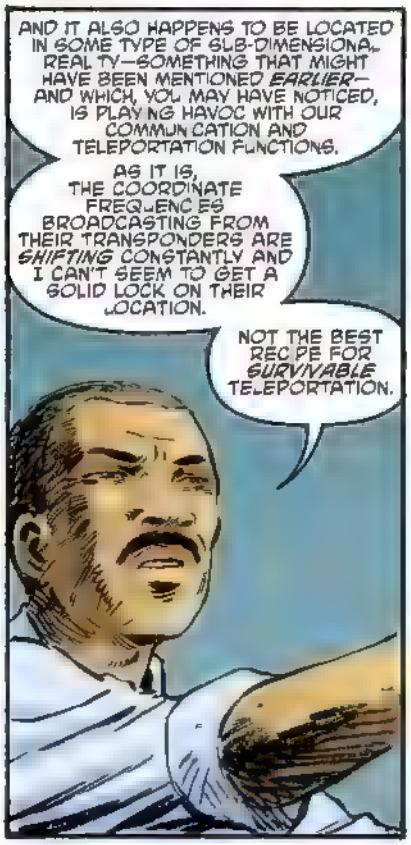

OH, YES...
...VERY ENTERTAINING INDEED.

GUYS, NEW PLAN—
HIDE!
squeek
SORRY, LITTLE DUDES.
AH, IT'S TO BE HIDE-AND-SEEK, IS IT? EXCELLENT! ALWAYS OUR FAVORITE GAME AS WEE IMMORTALS, NO?
OF COURSE, NONE WAS BETTER AT IT THAN GOOD OL' CHI-YOU. FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AND WE STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHERE THAT ONE'S HIDING, HEY, SISTER?
YOU ARE DETESTABLE, BROTHER.
YES, I KNOW.
SHALL WE?
OH, THIS BODES POORLY FOR MY POOR ABODE...
"STOCKMAN, DO YOU READ?!"


THIS IS LEO! WE'VE BEEN COMPROMISED! GET US OUT OF HERE!
I SAY AGAIN...

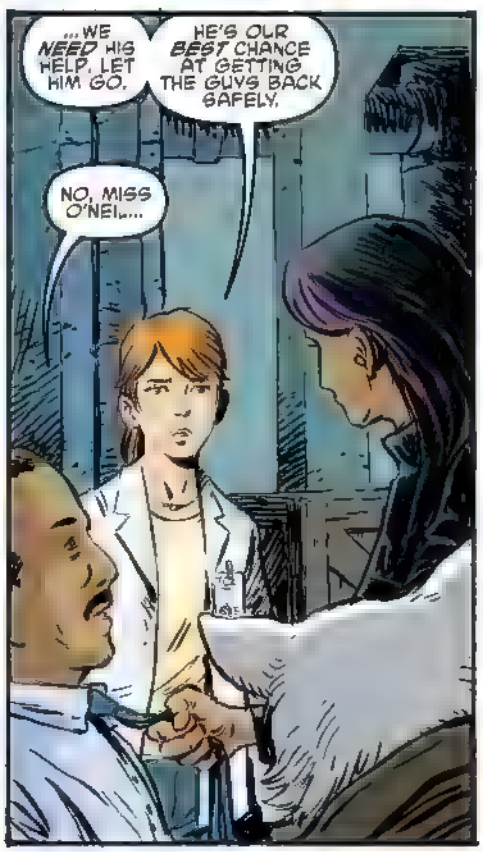
...E'VE BEEN... MISED!
WHAT IS THAT FOOL BABBLING ABOUT? "EVEN MICE?"
NO—I'M PRETTY SURE HE'S SAYING THEY'VE BEEN COMPROMISED!


WELL, OF COURSE THEY HAVE.
WHEN YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU'RE RIGHT, BAXTER OL' BOY.
GET 'EM OUTTA THERE, STOCKMAN! THAT PLACE IS A NUTHOUSE!

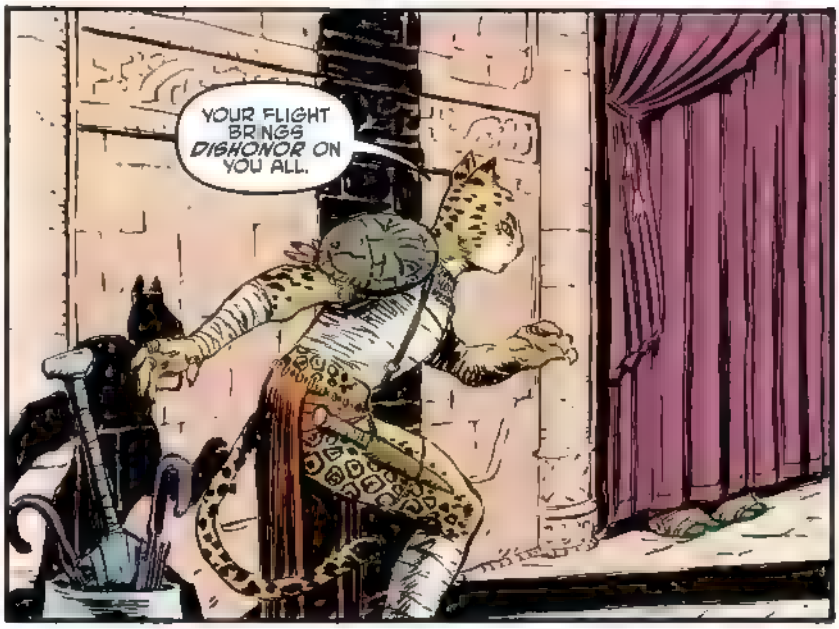

AND IT ALSO HAPPENS TO BE LOCATED IN SOME TYPE OF SUB-DIMENSIONAL REALITY—SOMETHING THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MENTIONED EARLIER—AND WHICH, YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED, IS PLAYING HAVOC WITH OUR COMMUNICATION AND TELEPORTATION FUNCTIONS.
AS IT IS, THE COORDINATE FREQUENCIES BROADCASTING FROM THEIR TRANSPONDERS ARE SHIFTING CONSTANTLY AND I CAN'T SEEM TO GET A SOLID LOCK ON THEIR LOCATION.
NOT THE BEST RECIPE FOR SURVIVABLE TELEPORTATION.

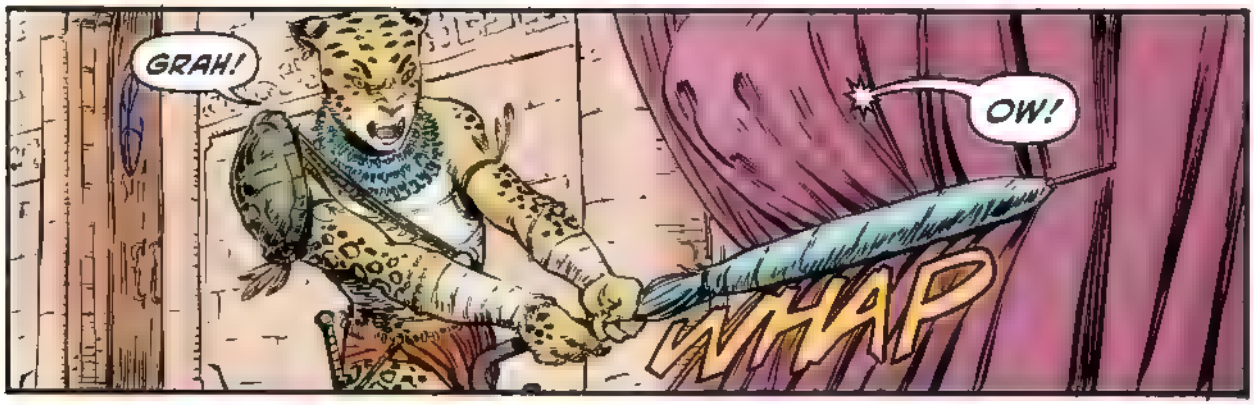
LISTEN TO ME, YOU BACK-STABBING JACKASS.
THIS BETTER NOT BE SOME KINDA TRICK OR ELSE YOU'RE GONNA BE THE ONE WITH SURVIVAL PROBLEMS.

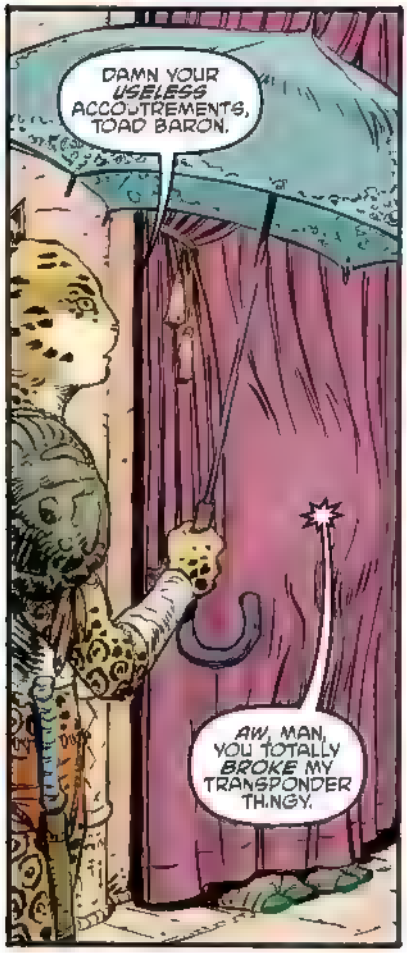
BY ALL MEANS—TAKE OVER IF YOU DON'T TRUST ME.
I'M SURE YOU LADIES CAN PINPOINT THE DIMENSIONAL FREQUENCY AND SAVE YOUR FRIENDS FAR QUICKER WITHOUT MY ASSISTANCE.
GUYS, HE'S RIGHT...


...WE NEED HIS HELP, LET HIM GO.
HE'S OUR BEST CHANCE AT GETTING THE GUYS BACK SAFELY.
NO, MISS O'NEIL...

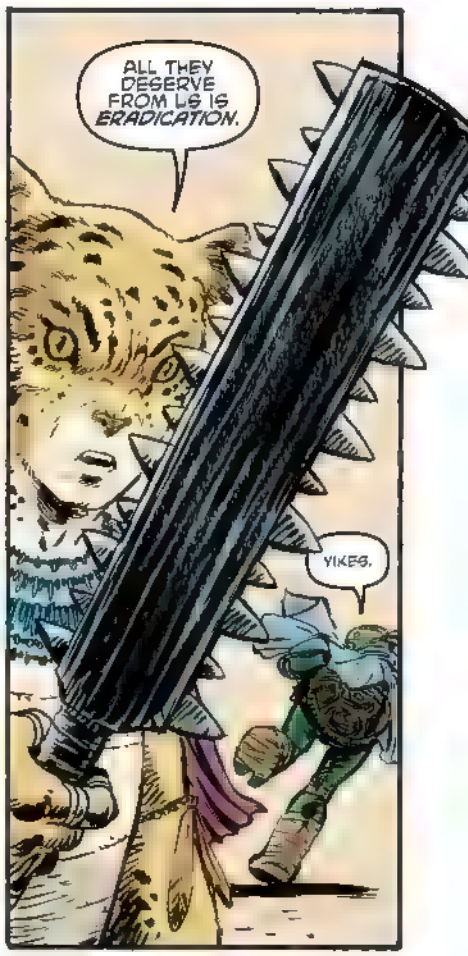
"...I'M YOUR ONLY CHANCE."
SHOW YOURSELVES, YOU DISGUSTING CREATURES.


YOUR FLIGHT BRINGS DISHONOR ON YOU ALL.


GRAH!
OW!
WHAP


DAMN YOUR USELESS ACCOUTREMENTS, TOAD BARON.
AW, MAN, YOU TOTALLY BROKE MY TRANSPONDER THINGY.

PLEASE, CEASE YOUR ATTACK, JAGWAR. THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR—THESE MUTANTS ARE SO MUCH MORE LIKE US THAN THE HUMANS.
THEY DESERVE OUR UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION, SISTER, NOT DESTRUCTION.
FEAR THEM? HA! THESE CREATURES ARE NOTHING MORE THAN FILTHY VERMIN, AKA.

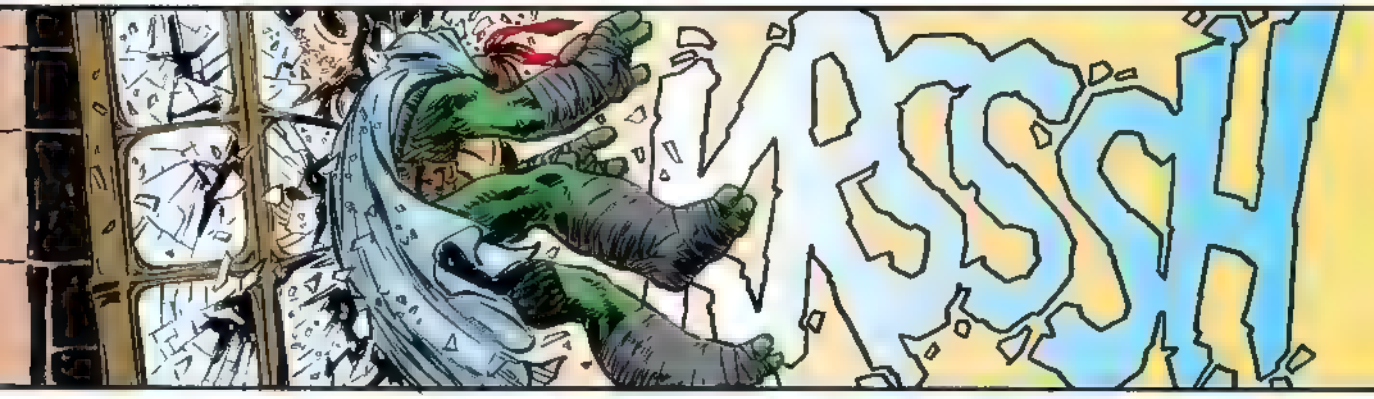

ALL THEY DESERVE FROM US IS ERADICATION.
YIKES.

SHWK
GAH!
HUH. I MISSED.
NOT MY PRICELESS ARTWORK, YOU DIDN'T!
STOCKMAN, DAMMIT, WHERE ARE YOU?!
ALBERTO!
DONNIE, STOCKMAN'S STILL NOT ANSWERING AND I ALMOST ATE AN ARROW FOR DINNER.
THAT'S NICE...
WHAT?
SOMETHING IN MY HEAD, LEO...
SO NICE...
OH, CRUD.

KITSUNE!
HEAR ME, DONATELLO—HEED MY CALL. JOIN ME AND I WILL SHOW YOU THINGS YOUR EVER SO INQUISITIVE MIND COULD NEVER IMAGINE WITHOUT ME.
JOIN ME...
JOIN THIS, WITCH!
FWP
INSOLENT FOOL!
COME ON, DON, GET IT TOGETHER! YOU CAN BEAT THEIR CONTROL—YOU JUST GOTTA FOCUS!
REMEMBER YOUR TRAI—
RAHH!
CLANG
BAD KITTY

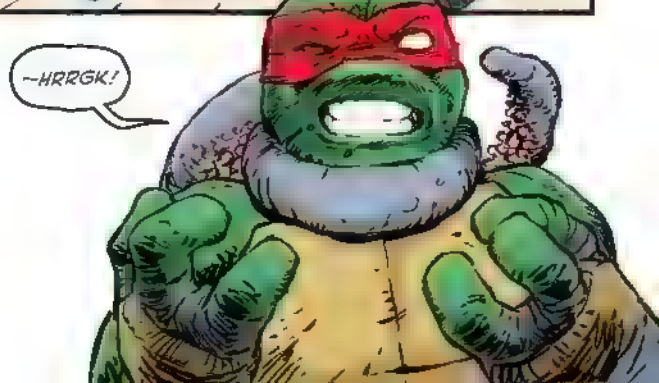
RAPH! HOW—
I GOT TIRED OF... ERGK... HIDIN'.

PWUMP
YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO GROWS TIRED OF THIS RIDICULOUS GAME, MUTANT.


KRASSH!

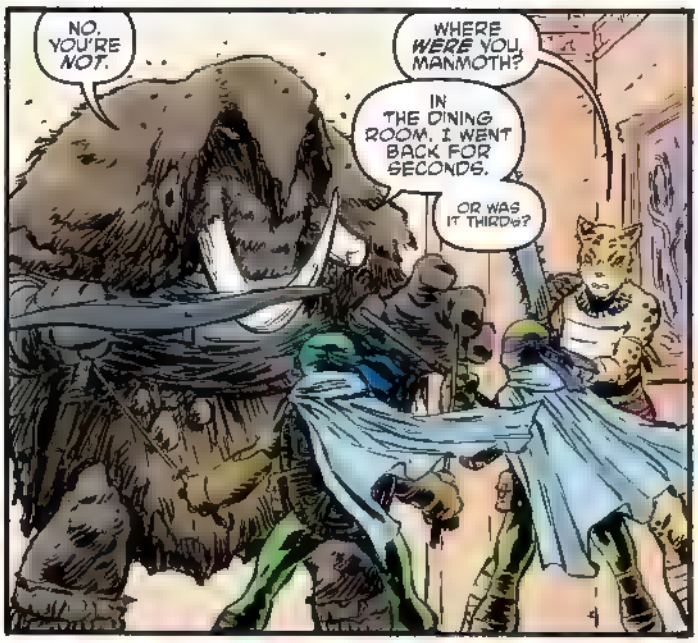
THE TIME HAS COME TO END THIS.
YOU'VE TRESPASSED INTO A SACRED EVENT AND YOU MUST BE PUNISHED.
SO SOON, SISTER? CAN'T WE PLAY A LITTLE LONGER BEFORE YOU MAKE WITH THE EXECUTIONS?
YOU ASK ME, THE FUN IS JUST GETTING STARTED.

WHY, GOOD ALBERTO.. WHY?
YOU WANT SOME PUNISHMENT, HUH?
THEN I'LL GIVE YOU SOME PU—

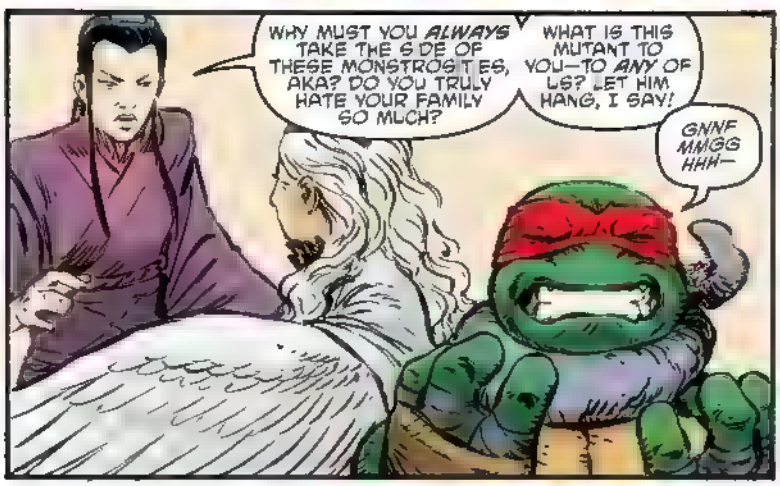

—HRRGK!

WELL, ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU ALL TO OUR BROTHER, GOTHANO.
GRGK HRR NRGG...
THE STRONG AND SILENT TYPE, OUR GOTHANO— DOESN'T SAY MUCH OF ANYTHING
BUT REALLY, AS YOU CAN SEE, HE DOESN'T HAVE TO.

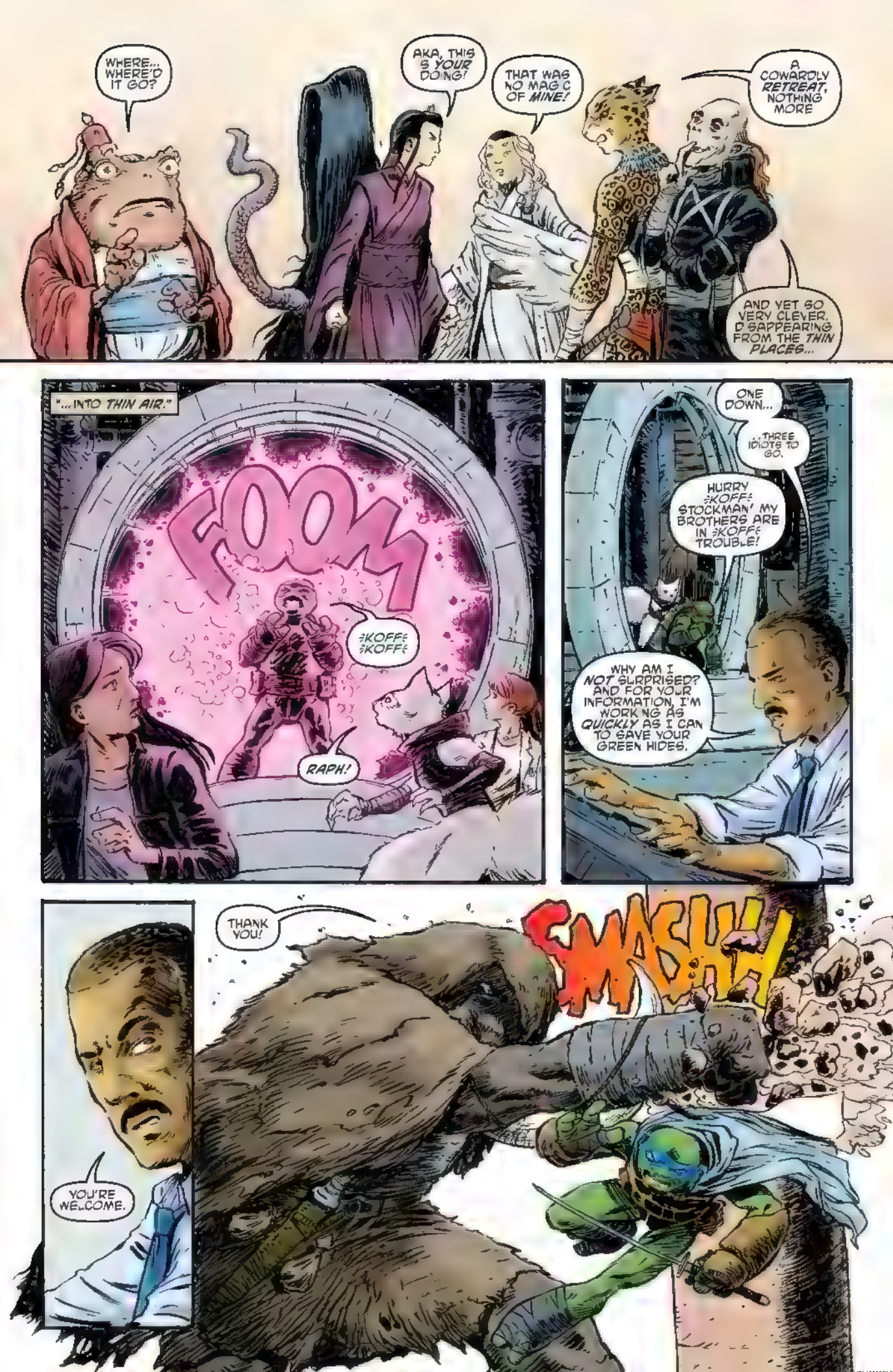
RAPH!
HOLD ON! WE'RE COMING!


NO. YOU'RE NOT.
WHERE WERE YOU, MANMOTH?
IN THE DINING ROOM. I WENT BACK FOR SECONDS.
OR WAS IT THIRDS?

PLEASE, BROTHER, RELEASE HIM. HE AND HIS BROTHERS HAVE DONE US NO HARM.
NO, BUT YOU HAVE, SISTER!


WHY MUST YOU ALWAYS TAKE THE SIDE OF THESE MONSTROSITIES, AKA? DO YOU TRULY HATE YOUR FAMILY SO MUCH?
WHAT IS THIS MUTANT TO YOU—TO ANY OF US? LET HIM HANG, I SAY!
GNNF MMGG HHH—

FOOM


WHERE... WHERE'D IT GO?
AKA, THIS S *YOUR* DO NG!
THAT WAS NO MAG C OF *MINE!*
A COWARDLY *RETREAT*, NOTHING MORE
AND YET SO VERY CLEVER, D SAPPEARING FROM THE *THIN PLACES*...
"...INTO *THIN AIR*."
FOOM
=KOFF= =KOFF=
RAPH!
ONE DOWN...
...THREE IDIOTS TO GO.
HURRY =KOFF= STOCKMAN' MY BROTHERS ARE IN =KOFF= TROUBLE!
WHY AM I *NOT* SURPRISED? AND FOR YOUR INFORMATION, I'M WORK NG AS *QUICKLY* AS I CAN TO SAVE YOUR GREEN HIDES.
THANK YOU!
SMASH!
YOU'RE WE..COME.

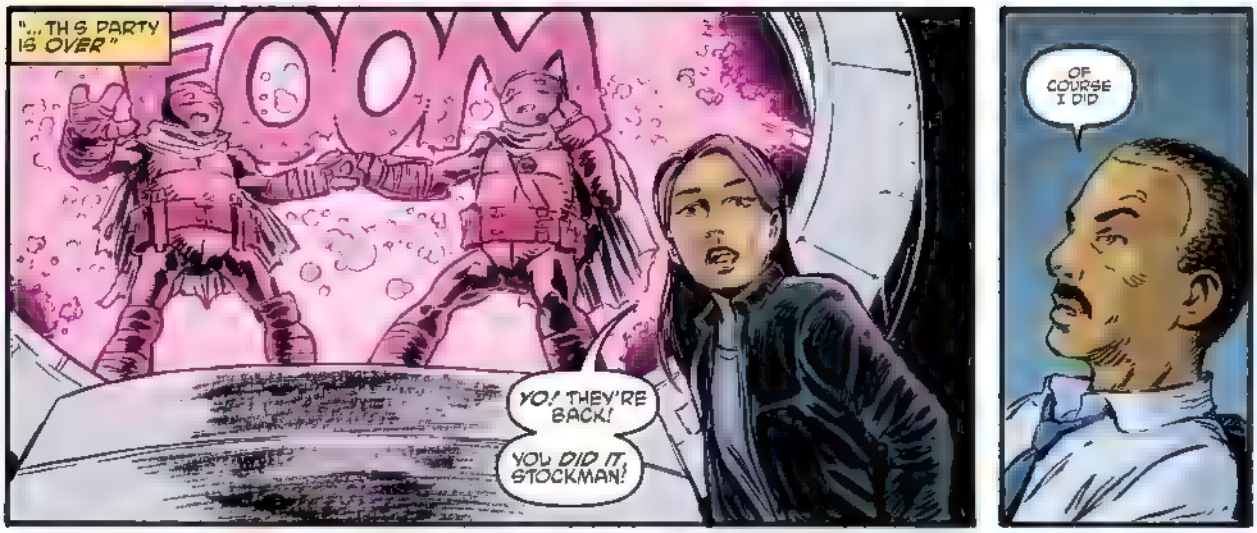
THERE'S NOTHING I APPRECIATE MORE THAN A BRAWL AFTER DINNER.
FWANG
UNF!
WHAK
A STAFF FIGHTER, HEY?
KRAKK
OKAY.
BIG BROTHER, NOOOOO!
I CAN DO THAT, TOO.
BASHH
FOOM
WHA—? GONE?
THANK GOD.
OH, ALBERTO... MY POOR DELIGHTFUL DEN!
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY, MASTER...

FOOM
GAHHH!
DONNIE!
YOU'RE BACK!
UM... YEAH. I... I KNEW THAT.
LEO AND MIKEY?
STILL THERE, DAMM.T!
YES, AND I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET THEM BACK FASTER F I DIDN'T HAVE TH S LUMMOX BREATHING IN MY EAR.
WHATEVER, STOCKMAN...
"..JUST SAVE MY BROTHERS."
WHO W LL RESCUE YOL NOW, MUTANT--
--NOW THAT YOU FIND YOURSELF ALL ALONE?
HE'S NOT A..ONE, RAT DUDE!
NOT WHEN HIS LITTLE BRO'S STILL ON THE CASE

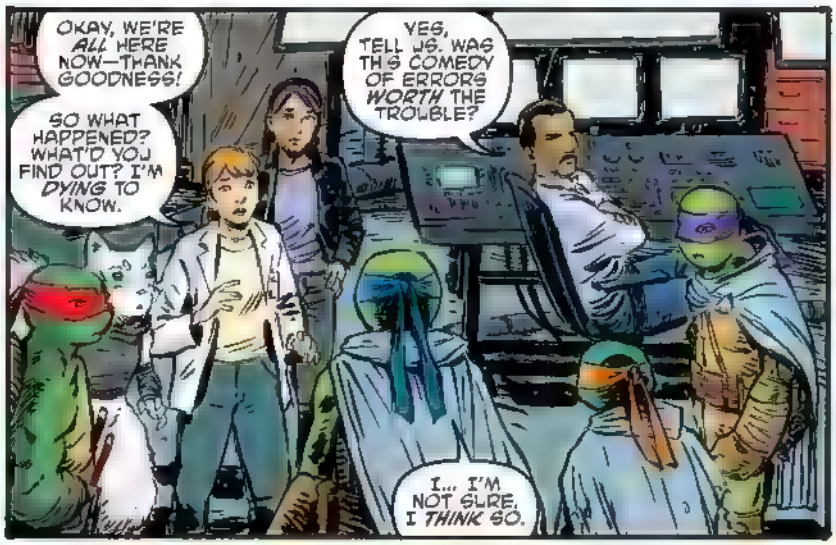
MIKEY! I WAS WORR ED THEY HURT YOU OR... WORSE.
NAH, I'M GOOD. JUST GOT MY TRANSPONDER WHACKED IS ALL.
WHICH MEANS I'LL REALLY BE DEAD WHEN HAROLD FINDS OUT.
'SIDES, I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU BY YOURSELF, BIG BRO.
FOOM
LEO?
AND THEN THERE WAS ONE.
FOOM
IT'S LEO!
BUT NO MIKEY.
WHERE'S M KEY, STOCKMAN?!
THAT... THAT WAS THE ONLY REMAINING S GNAL. ACCORD NG TO THESE READ NGS...
...THERE IS NO MIKEY.
OH, NO...

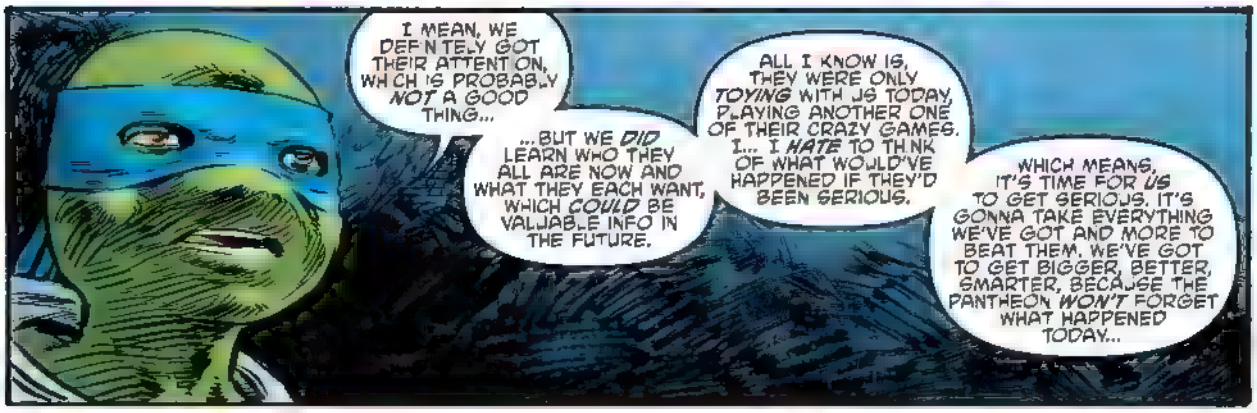
"...HIS TRANSPONDER"
AW, COME ON, PANTHEON DUDES... CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT THIS?
NO MORE TALKING, MUTANT. THIS IS KILLING TIME.
DO YOU THINK TURTLE TASTES LIKE CHICKEN, TOO?
SORRY TO SAY, MANMOTH, BUT THERE WON'T BE MUCH LEFT TO TASTE..
"...NOT AFTER MY PETS ARE DONE WITH HIM."
EW! EW! EW!
OF COURSE, I COULD CALL MY CHILDREN BACK. IT'LL BE SUCH A GRUESOME, TORTUROUS DEMISE FOR OUR MUTANT FRIEND IF I DON'T. WHAT SAY YOU, GOOD GOTHAN? MERCY FOR OUR UNINVITED GUEST?
I THOUGHT NOT.
GRUESOME DEATH, IT IS!
THIS IS GOING TO LEAVE A STAIN, I JUST KNOW IT
NO!

BROTHERS! SISTERS! HEAR ME! THERE IS NO REASON TO HARM THIS CHILD.
HE AND HIS BRETHREN SOUGHT US OUT ONLY BECAUSE IT WAS MEMBERS OF OUR VERY OWN FAMILY WHO FIRST BROUGHT US TO THEIR ATTENTION.
IS THAT NOT TRUE... KITSUNE AND RAT KING?
IT WAS A STRATEGIC DECISION, NOTHING MORE.
I JUST WANTED TO HAVE SOME FUN SABOTAGING KITSUNE. INJECT A LITTLE CHAOS INTO HER ORDER, SO TO SPEAK.
WHATEVER YOUR REASONS, YOU TWO ARE ULTIMATELY TO BLAME FOR THIS INTRUSION TODAY...
...NOT THESE POOR, HELPLESS MUTANTS.
PLEASE, GOD... I SWEAR I'LL NEVER MAKE FUN OF FATHER'S TAIL AGAIN IF YOU JUST GET ME OUTTA THIS.
FOOM
LEO?
GRAB MY HAND, MIKE.
STOCKMAN, I'VE GOT HIM. DO IT NOW!
FOOM
HELPLESS, INDEED
COWARDS.
TRICKY LITTLE BEASTS.
THIS IS EXACTLY WHY WE NEED FATHER BACK.
OH, HUSH, YOU SILLY GIRL!
BROTHERS, SISTERS, I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE THE ONE TO SAY THIS, BUT...


"...THIS PARTY IS OVER"
FOOM
YO! THEY'RE BACK!
YOU DID IT, STOCKMAN!
OF COURSE I DID

THANKS FOR COMIN' BACK FOR ME, LEO.
HEY, I'D NEVER LEAVE YOU BY YOURSELF, LITTLE BRO.


OKAY, WE'RE ALL HERE NOW—THANK GOODNESS!
SO WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT'D YOU FIND OUT? I'M DYING TO KNOW.
YES, TELL US. WAS THIS COMEDY OF ERRORS WORTH THE TROUBLE?
I... I'M NOT SURE, I THINK SO.


I MEAN, WE DEFINITELY GOT THEIR ATTENTION, WHICH IS PROBABLY NOT A GOOD THING...
...BUT WE DID LEARN WHO THEY ALL ARE NOW AND WHAT THEY EACH WANT, WHICH COULD BE VALUABLE INFO IN THE FUTURE.
ALL I KNOW IS, THEY WERE ONLY TOYING WITH US TODAY, PLAYING ANOTHER ONE OF THEIR CRAZY GAMES. I... I HATE TO THINK OF WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF THEY'D BEEN SERIOUS.
WHICH MEANS, IT'S TIME FOR US TO GET SERIOUS. IT'S GONNA TAKE EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT AND MORE TO BEAT THEM. WE'VE GOT TO GET BIGGER, BETTER, SMARTER, BECAUSE THE PANTHEON WON'T FORGET WHAT HAPPENED TODAY...

...AND NEITHER WILL CLAN HAMATO.

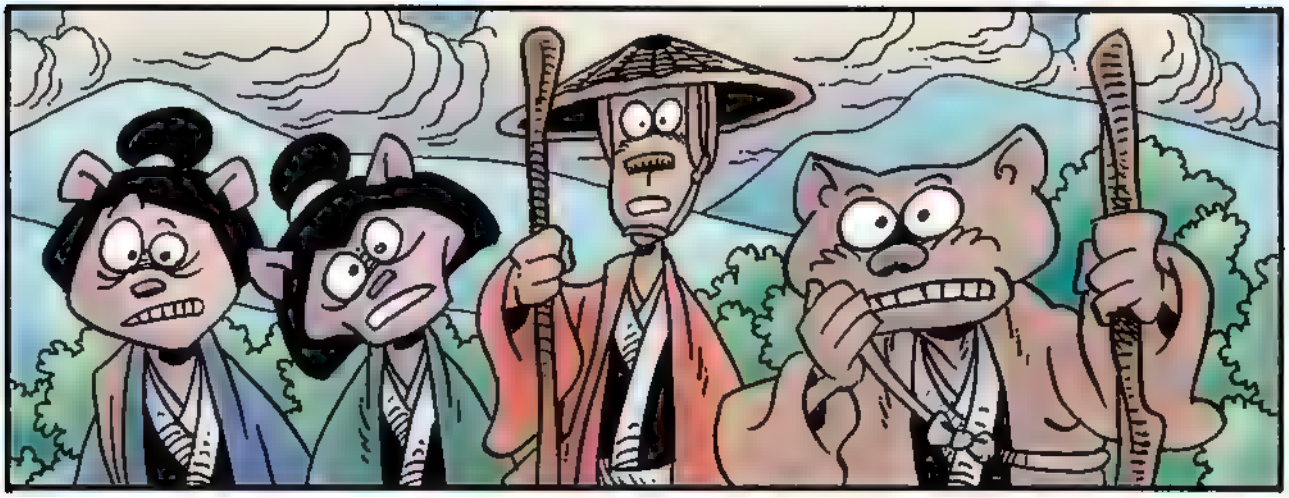
ART BY KEVIN EASTMAN
COLORS BY TODD HARRIS

TMNT / USAGI YOJIMBO

STAN SAKAI

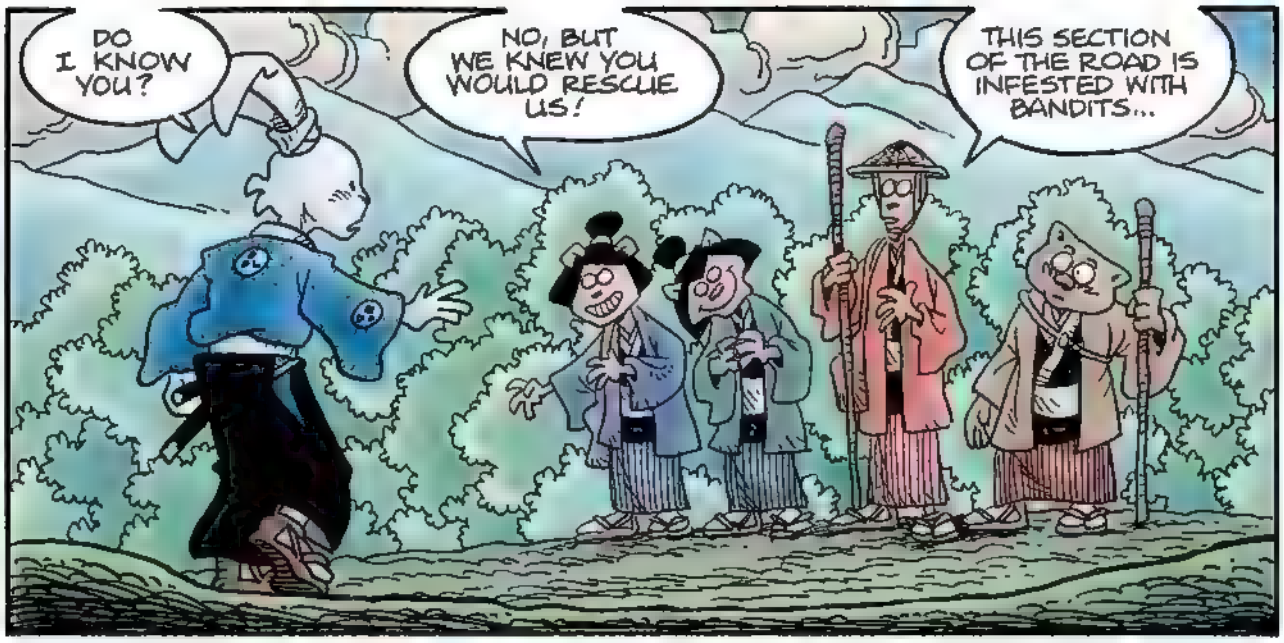
TOM LUTH

ULK?
ARR--!
FWOOK!
YAHH!
.....



NAMAZU
OR THE BIG FISH STORY

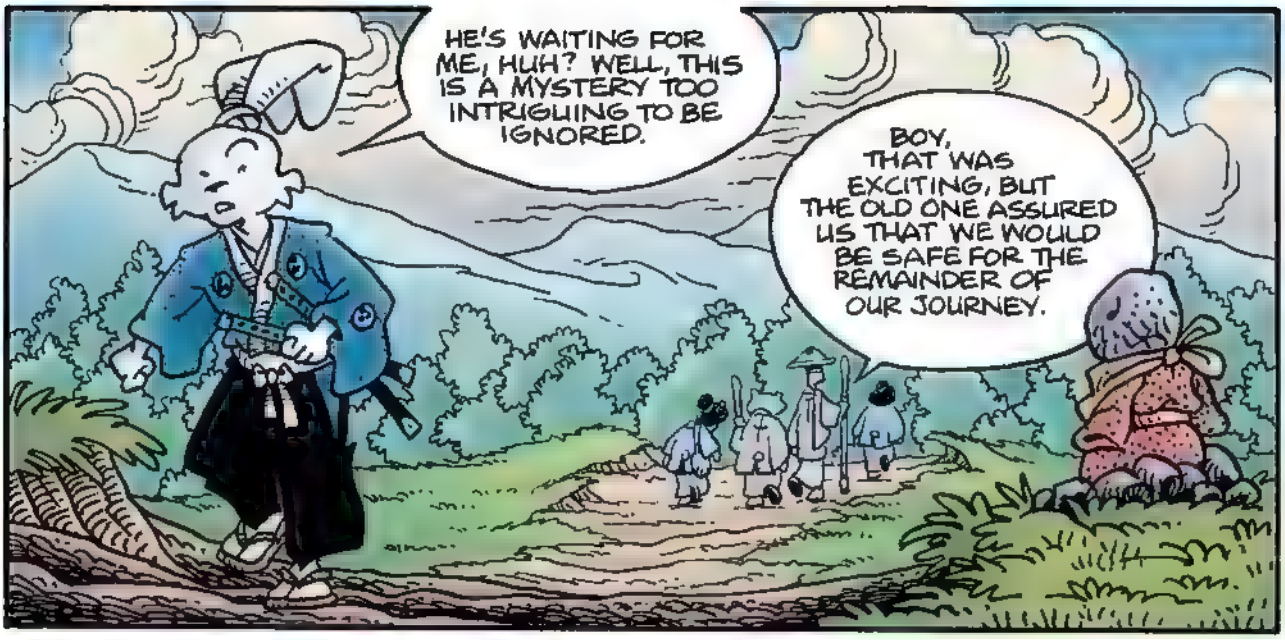
RYAAAHHH!
EEYAHHHH--!
THANK YOU, USAGI-SAN!
THANK YOU!
EH?

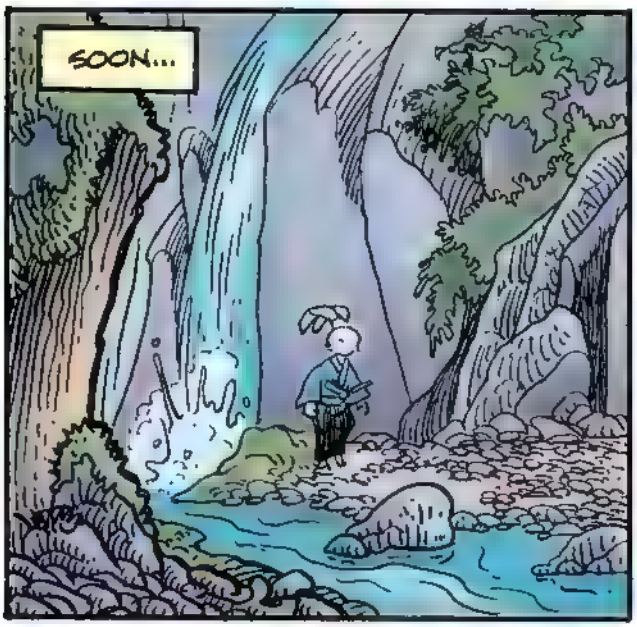

DO I KNOW YOU?
NO, BUT WE KNEW YOU WOULD RESCUE US!
THIS SECTION OF THE ROAD IS INFESTED WITH BANDITS...

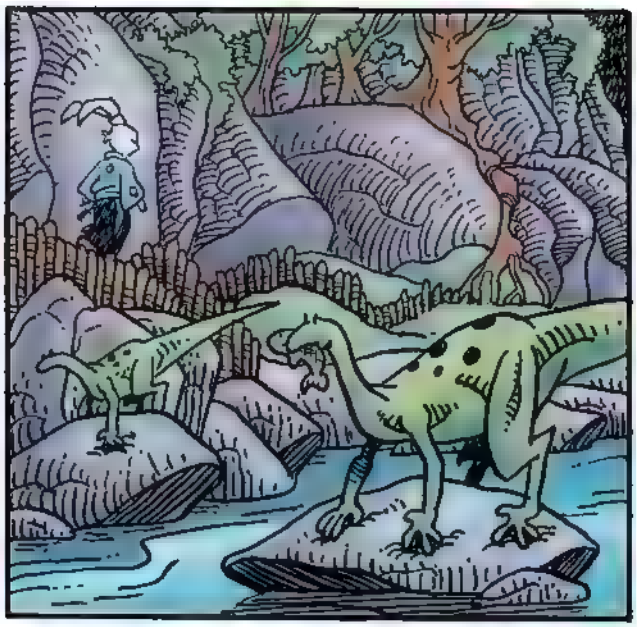
...BUT THE OLD ONE ASSURED US THAT YOU WOULD PROTECT US ON OUR PILGRIMAGE TO THE EIGHTY-EIGHT SHRINES.

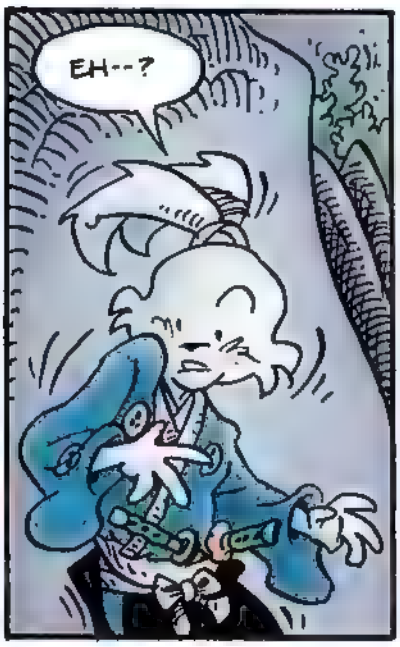
"THE OLD ONE"?

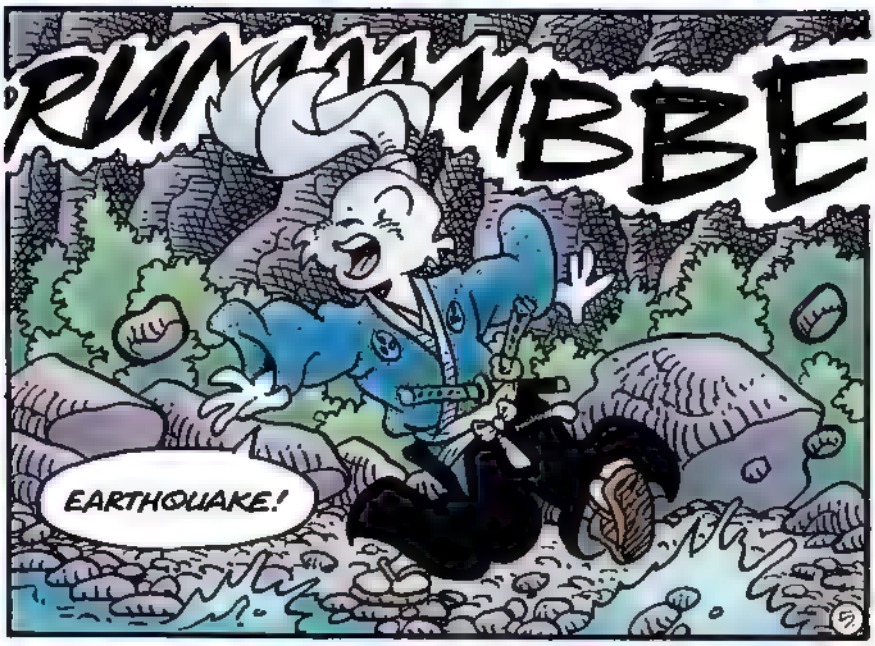
HE IS EXPECTING YOU...
...IN THE CAVE IN THE GREEN GROTTO.

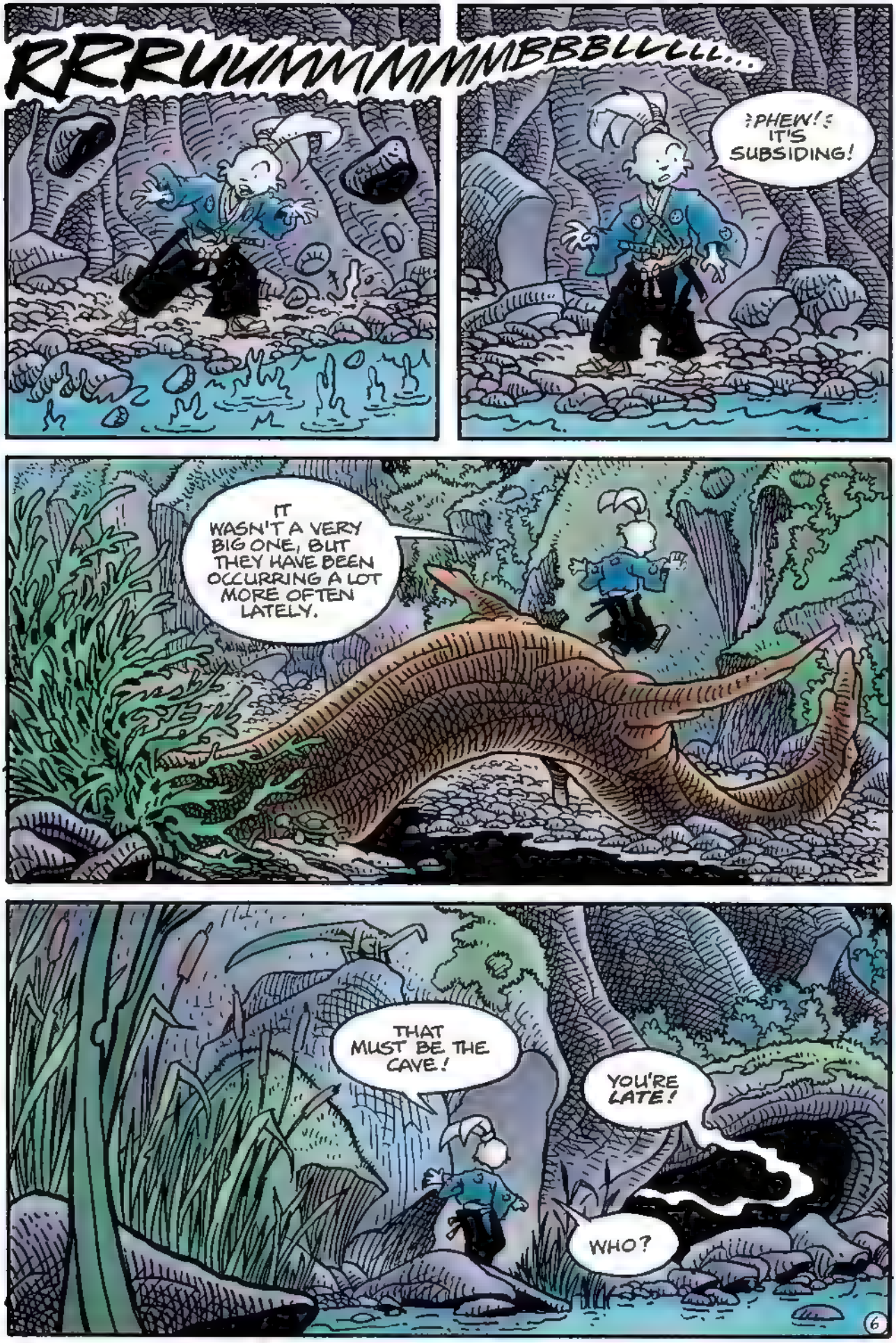

HE'S WAITING FOR ME, HUH? WELL, THIS IS A MYSTERY TOO INTRIGUING TO BE IGNORED.
BOY, THAT WAS EXCITING, BUT THE OLD ONE ASSURED US THAT WE WOULD BE SAFE FOR THE REMAINDER OF OUR JOURNEY.

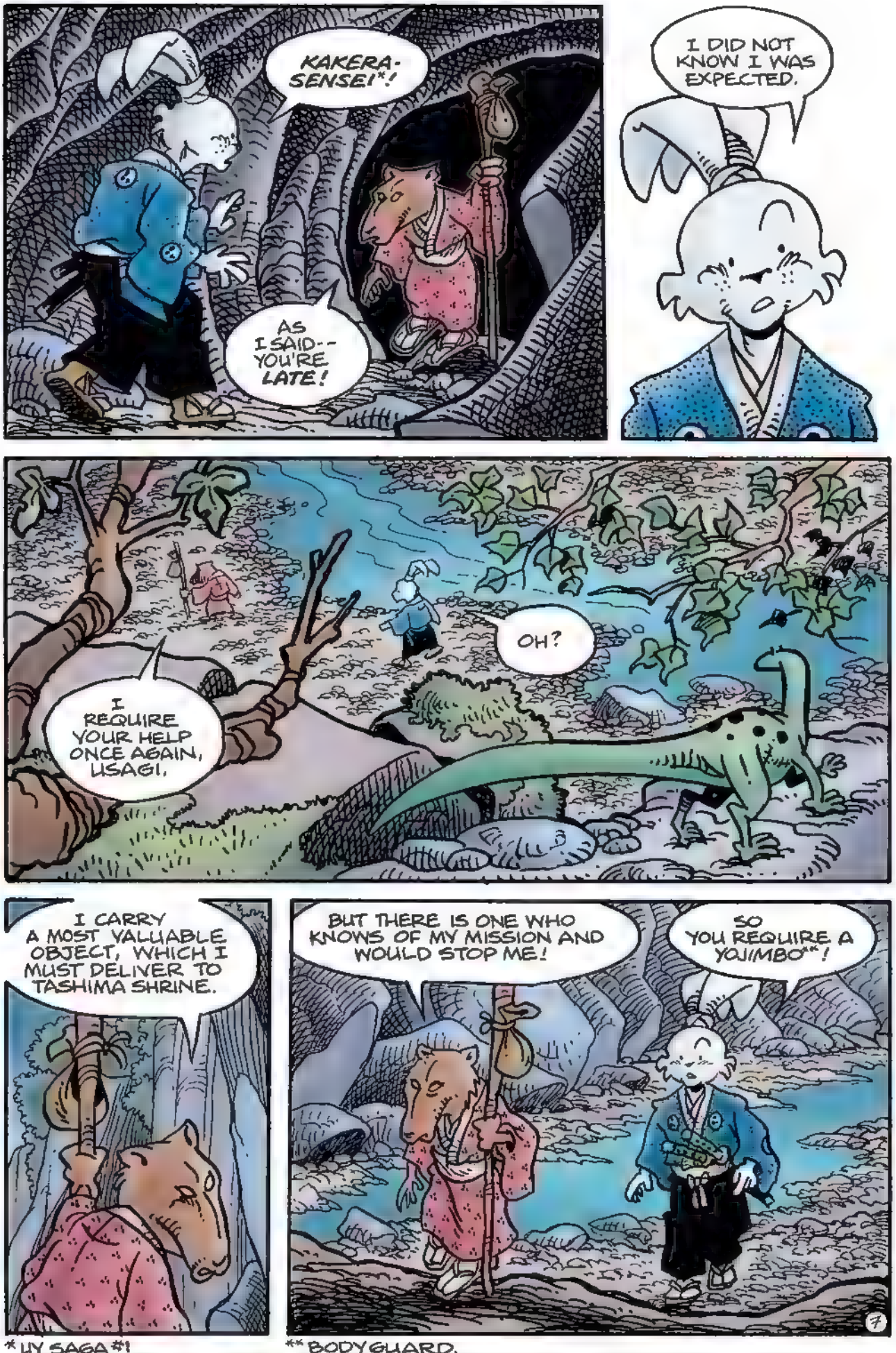

SOON...




EH--?

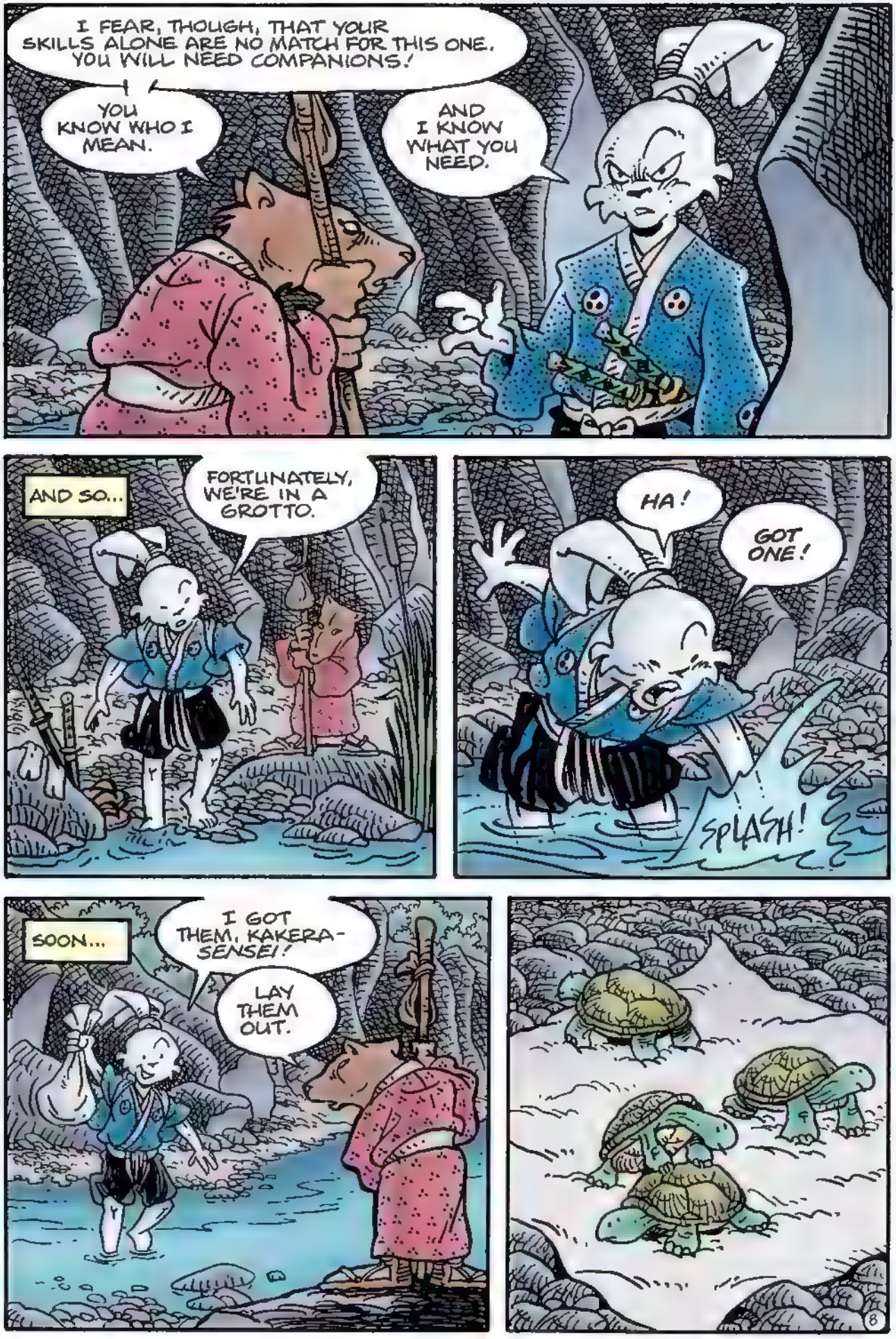

RUMBLE
EARTHQUAKE!


RRRUUMMMMMBBBLLLLL...
PHEW! IT'S SUBSIDING!
IT WASN'T A VERY BIG ONE, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN OCCURRING A LOT MORE OFTEN LATELY.
THAT MUST BE THE CAVE!
YOU'RE LATE!
WHO?
6


KAKERA-SENSEI*!
AS I SAID-- YOU'RE LATE!
I DID NOT KNOW I WAS EXPECTED.
OH?
I REQUIRE YOUR HELP ONCE AGAIN, USAGI.
I CARRY A MOST VALUABLE OBJECT, WHICH I MUST DELIVER TO TASHIMA SHRINE.
BUT THERE IS ONE WHO KNOWS OF MY MISSION AND WOULD STOP ME!
SO YOU REQUIRE A YOJIMBO**!
7

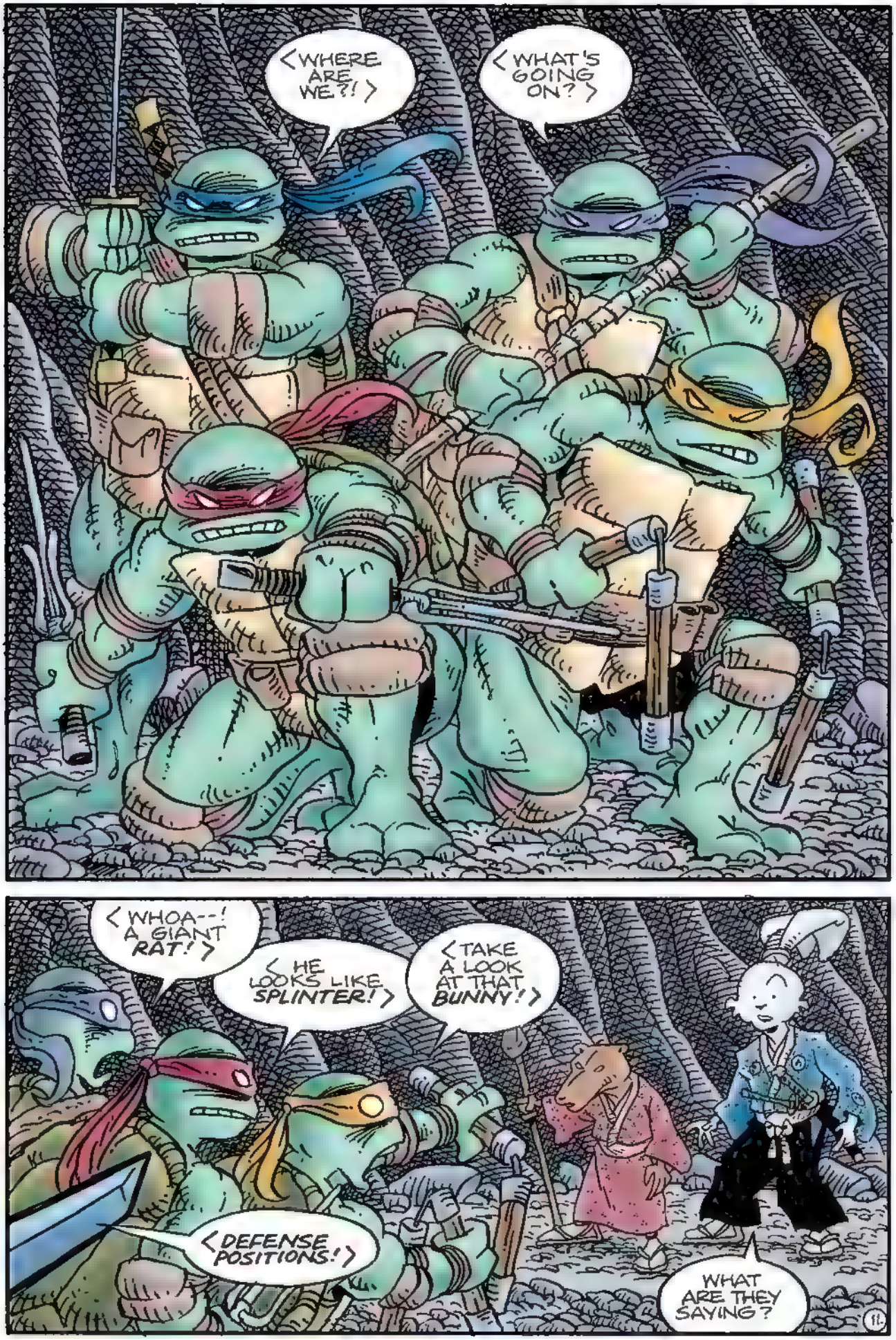
*UY SAGA #1 'SHADES of GREEN'

**BODYGUARD.

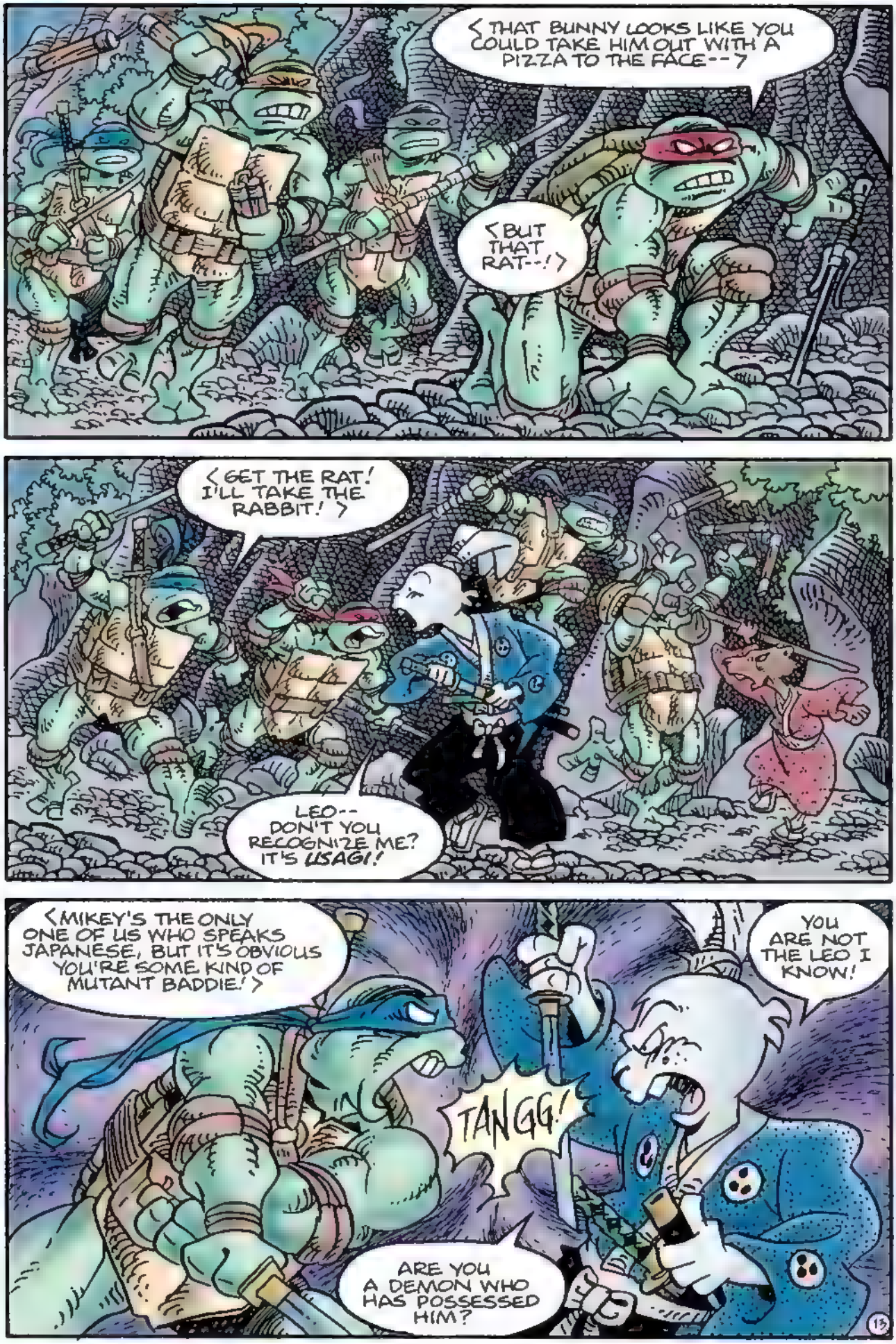

I FEAR, THOUGH, THAT YOUR SKILLS ALONE ARE NO MATCH FOR THIS ONE. YOU WILL NEED COMPANIONS!
YOU KNOW WHO I MEAN.
AND I KNOW WHAT YOU NEED.
AND SO...
FORTUNATELY, WE'RE IN A GROTTO.
HA!
GOT ONE!
SPLASH!
SOON...
I GOT THEM, KAKERA-SENSEI!
LAY THEM OUT.

*VOID **EARTH ***FIRE ****WATER *****WIND

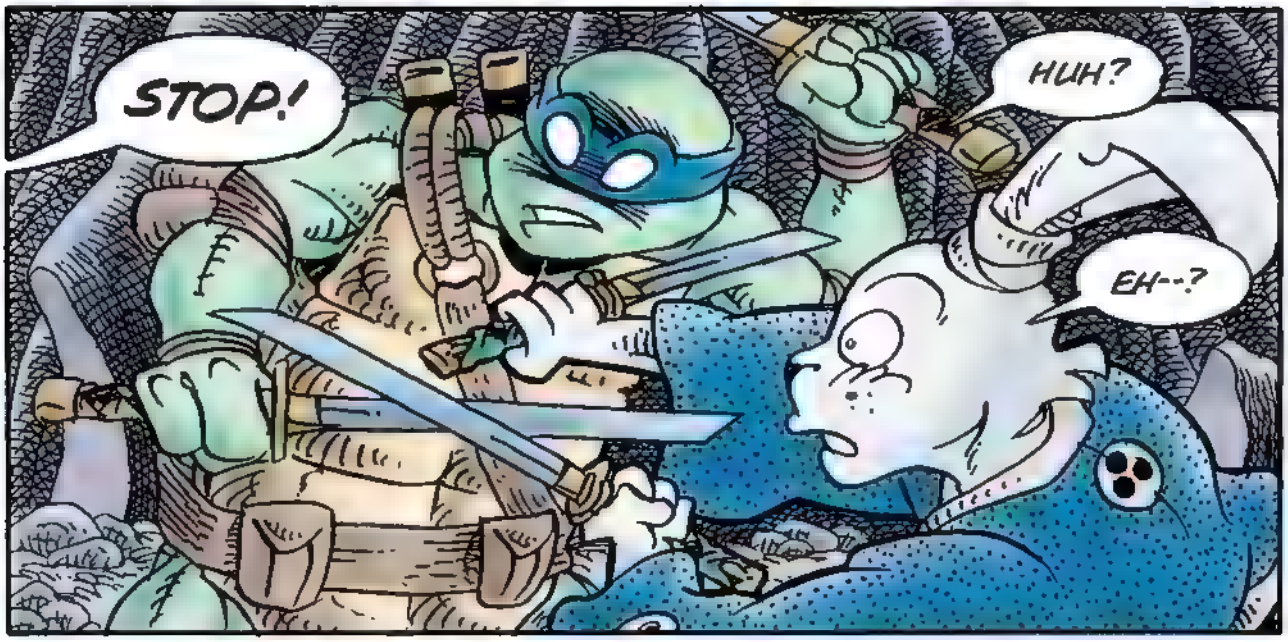
*TURTLES

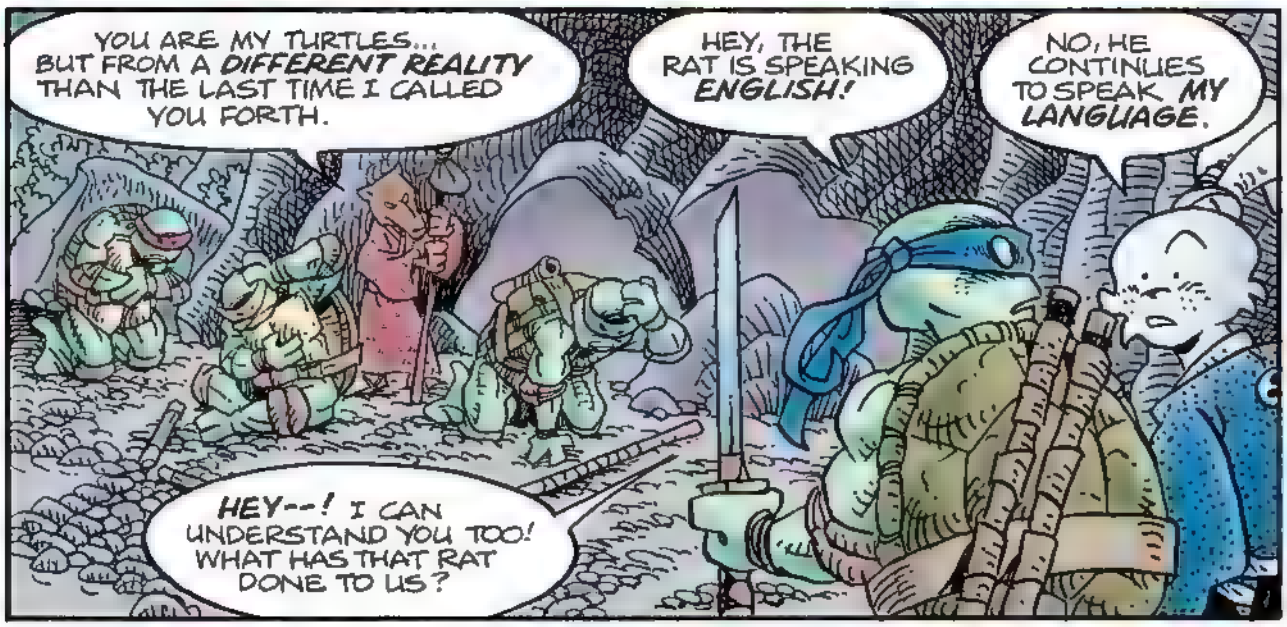

< WHERE ARE WE?! >
< WHAT'S GOING ON? >
< WHOA--! A GIANT RAT! >
< HE LOOKS LIKE SPLINTER! >
< TAKE A LOOK AT THAT BUNNY! >
< DEFENSE POSITIONS! >
WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?
11

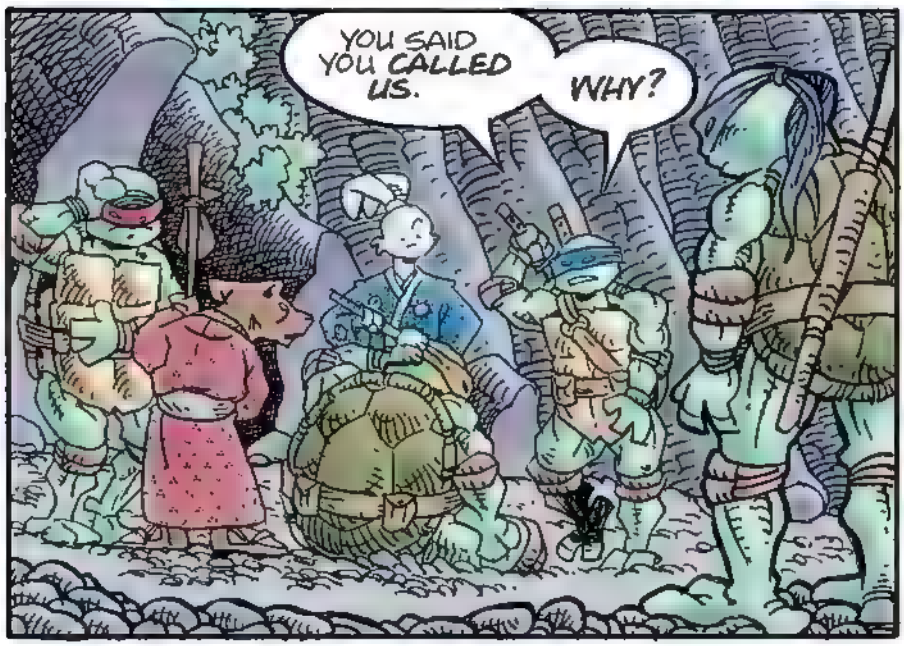
< WELL, THE BEST DEFENSE IS A STRONG OFFENSE! >
< RAPH-- WAIT! >
FLOO--!
WHACK!
OW!
< RAPH--! >
UHH--!


〈THAT BUNNY LOOKS LIKE YOU COULD TAKE HIM OUT WITH A PIZZA TO THE FACE--〉
〈BUT THAT RAT--!〉
〈GET THE RAT! I'LL TAKE THE RABBIT!〉
LEO-- DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE ME? IT'S USAGI!
〈MIKEY'S THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO SPEAKS JAPANESE, BUT IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'RE SOME KIND OF MUTANT BADDIE!〉
YOU ARE NOT THE LEO I KNOW!
TANGG!
ARE YOU A DEMON WHO HAS POSSESSED HIM?
15

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY FRIEND, LEO?
<SO, YOU'RE BETTER WITH THE SWORD THAN YOU LOOK, EH, LONG EARS?>
HOW CAN ONE SO BULKY BE SO AGILE?
TANG!
TANK!
TANG!
TANG!
TANG

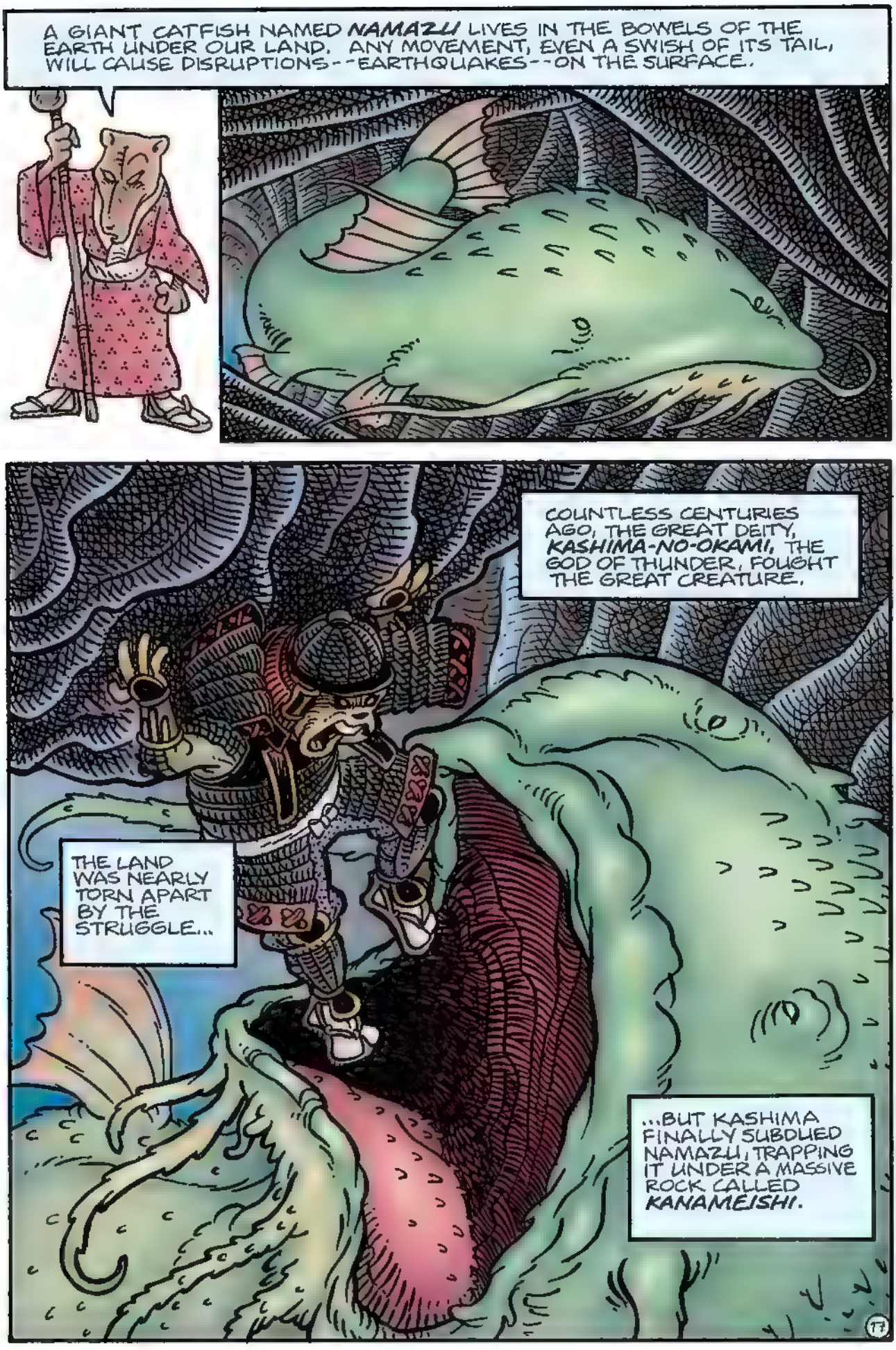

STOP!
HUH?
EH--?

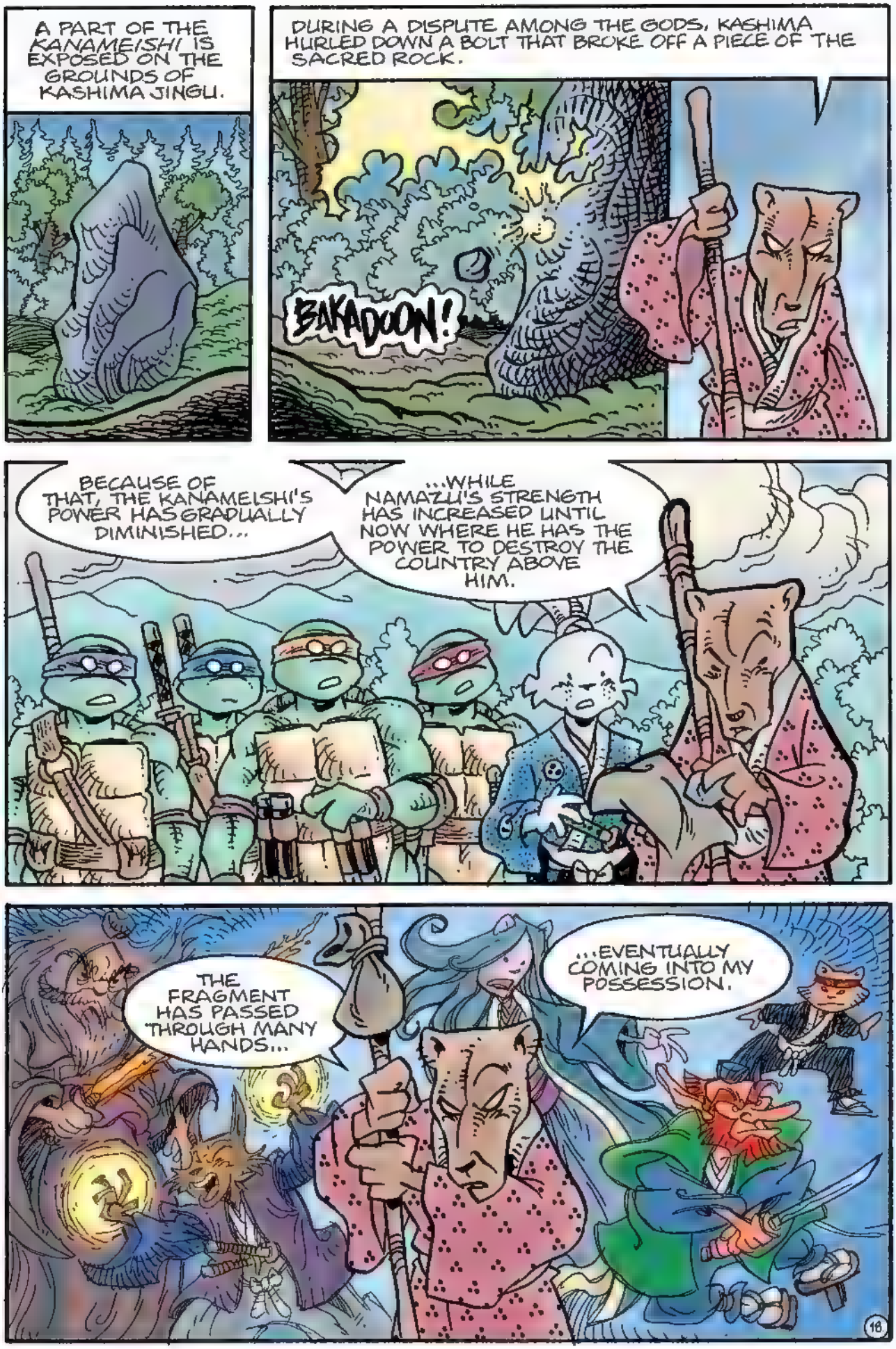

YOU ARE MY TURTLES... BUT FROM A DIFFERENT REALITY THAN THE LAST TIME I CALLED YOU FORTH.
HEY, THE RAT IS SPEAKING ENGLISH!
NO, HE CONTINUES TO SPEAK MY LANGUAGE.
HEY--! I CAN UNDERSTAND YOU TOO! WHAT HAS THAT RAT DONE TO US?

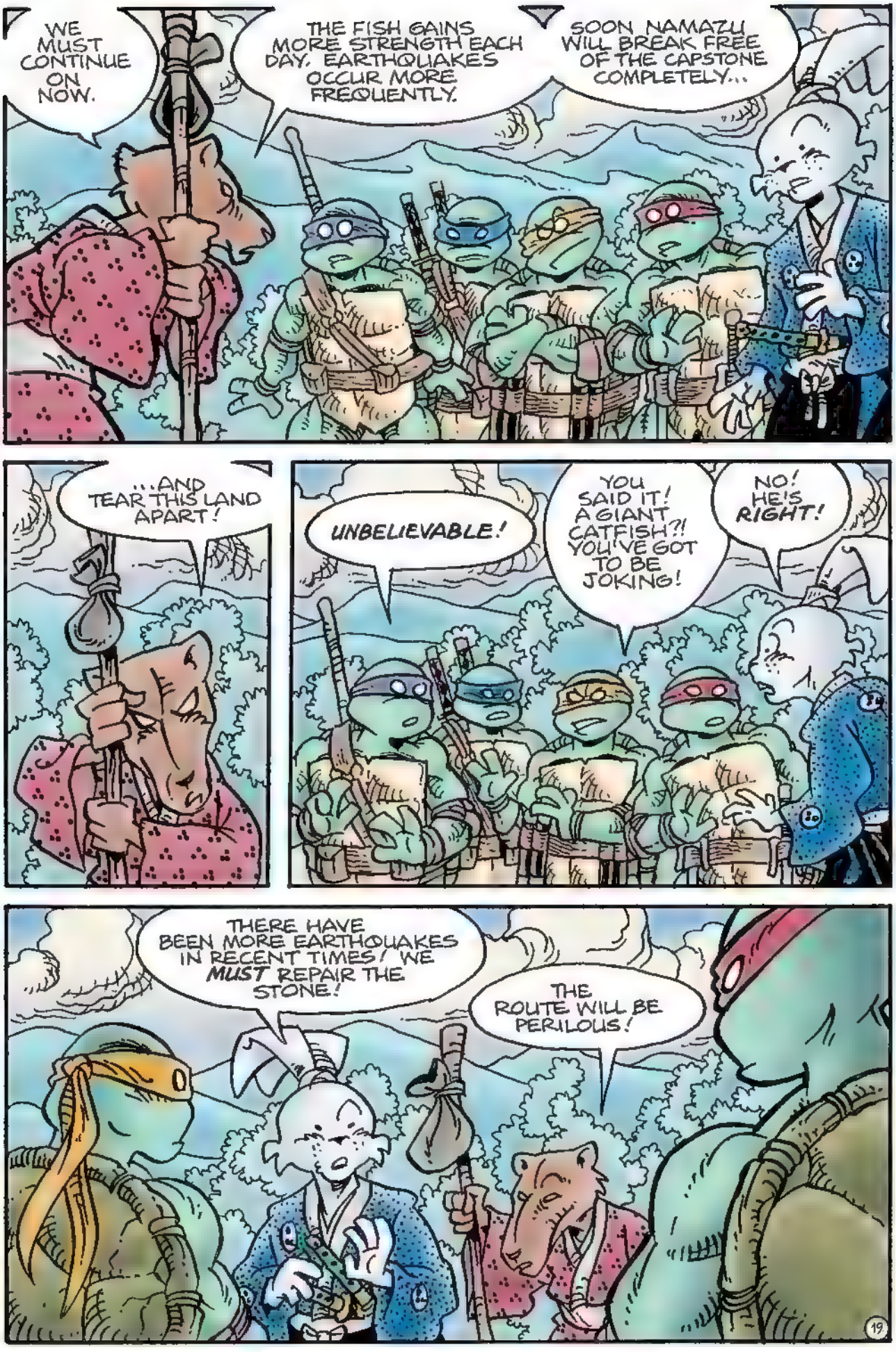

YOU SAID YOU CALLED US.
WHY?

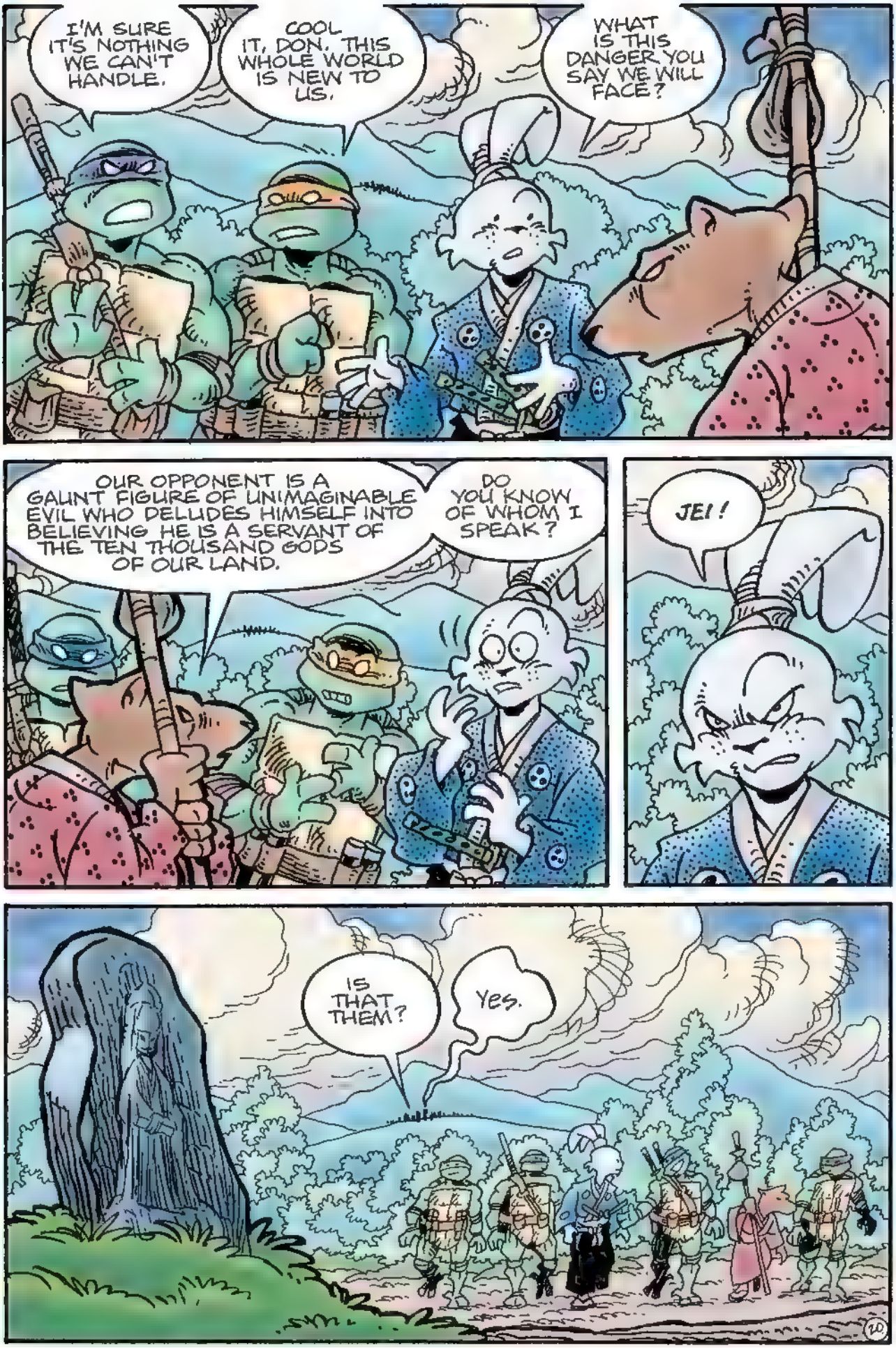
TIME IS SHORT. I WILL TELL YOU EVERYTHING AS WE JOURNEY.
15

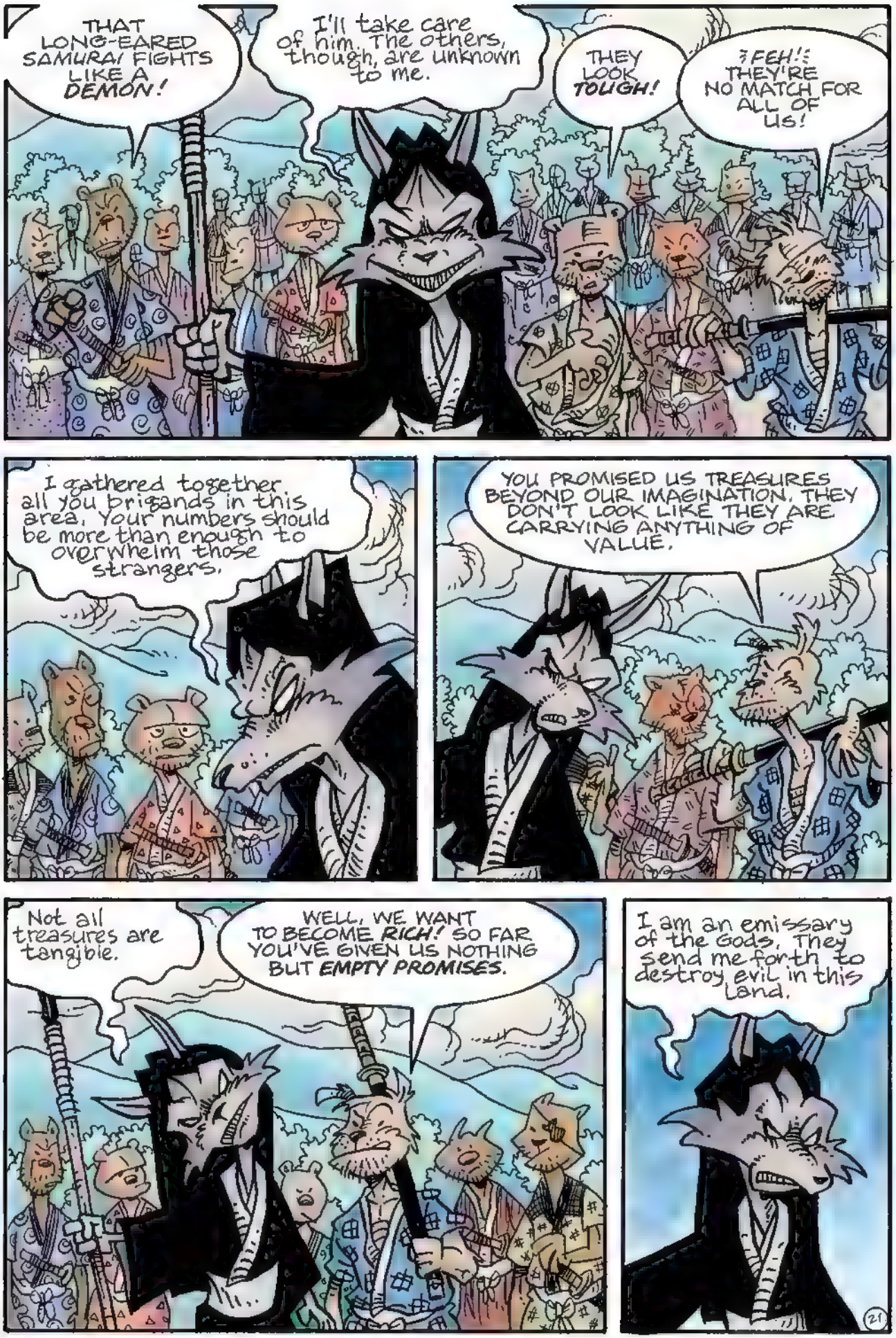
AND SO...
WHAT IS THIS OBJECT WE MUST DELIVER TO KASHIMA SHRINE?
YEAH. CAN WE SEE IT, OR IS IT TOO MYSTICAL FOR OUR ORDINARY EYES?
EEP!
HEY-- CHECK OUT THOSE MONKEY WOODCUTTERS WALKING TOWARDS US!
FREAKY!
NO, I CAN SHOW IT TO YOU.
BEHOLD!
:GASP!:
:GASP!:
:GASP!:
:GASP!:
:GASP!:
WAIT A MINUTE--!
IT'S A ROCK!
NO ORDINARY ROCK. IF WE DO NOT COMPLETE OUR TASK OUR ENTIRE LAND WILL BE DESTROYED!
I WILL EXPLAIN.


A GIANT CATFISH NAMED NAMAZU LIVES IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH UNDER OUR LAND. ANY MOVEMENT, EVEN A SWISH OF ITS TAIL, WILL CAUSE DISRUPTIONS--EARTHQUAKES--ON THE SURFACE.
COUNTLESS CENTURIES AGO, THE GREAT DEITY, KASHIMA-NO-OKAMI, THE GOD OF THUNDER, FOUGHT THE GREAT CREATURE.
THE LAND WAS NEARLY TORN APART BY THE STRUGGLE...
...BUT KASHIMA FINALLY SUBDUED NAMAZU, TRAPPING IT UNDER A MASSIVE ROCK CALLED KANAMEISHI.
17


A PART OF THE KANAMEISHI IS EXPOSED ON THE GROUNDS OF KASHIMA JINGU.
DURING A DISPUTE AMONG THE GODS, KASHIMA HURLED DOWN A BOLT THAT BROKE OFF A PIECE OF THE SACRED ROCK.
BAKADOON!
BECAUSE OF THAT, THE KANAMEISHI'S POWER HAS GRADUALLY DIMINISHED...
...WHILE NAMAZU'S STRENGTH HAS INCREASED UNTIL NOW WHERE HE HAS THE POWER TO DESTROY THE COUNTRY ABOVE HIM.
THE FRAGMENT HAS PASSED THROUGH MANY HANDS...
...EVENTUALLY COMING INTO MY POSSESSION.
16

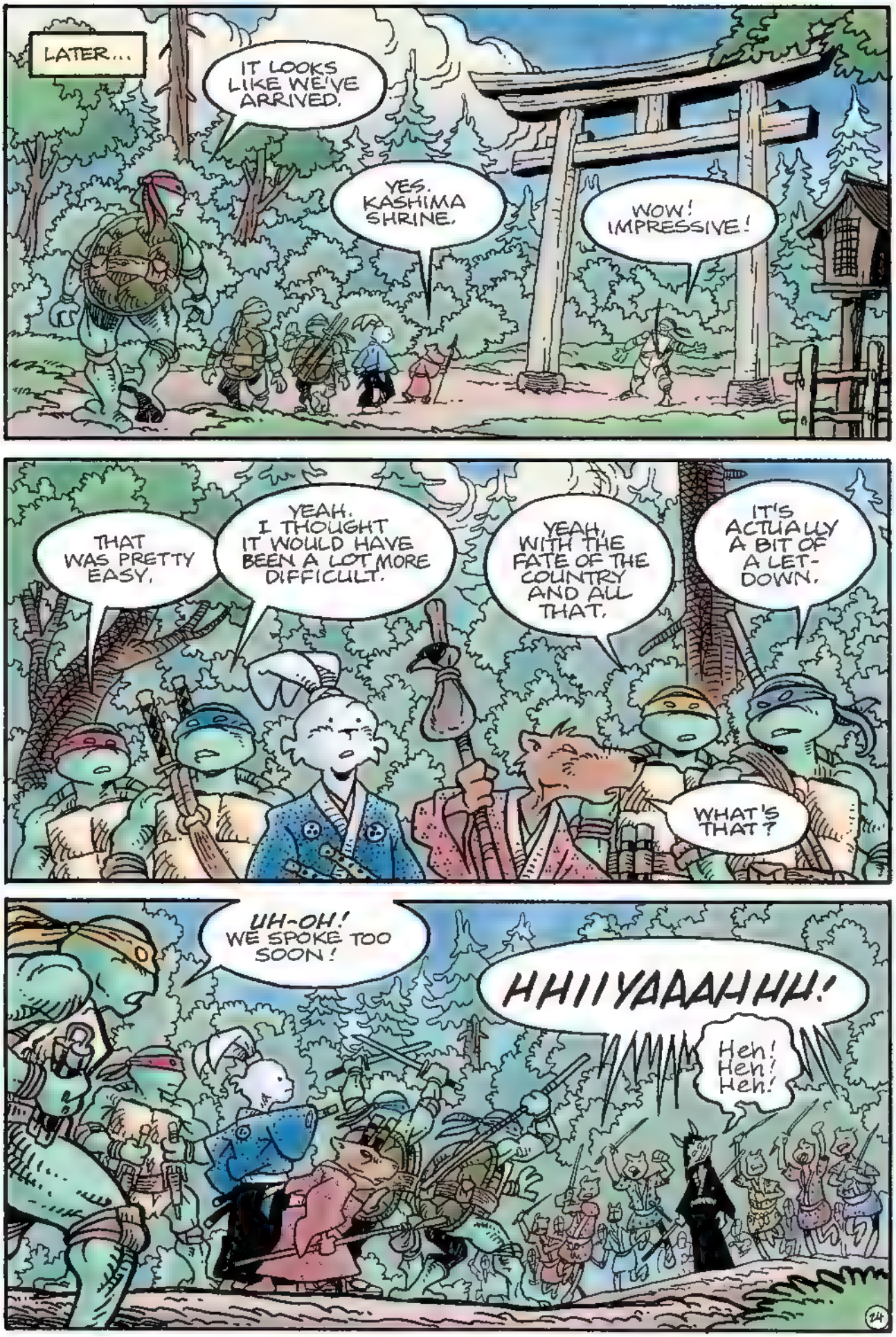

WE MUST CONTINUE ON NOW.
THE FISH GAINS MORE STRENGTH EACH DAY. EARTHQUAKES OCCUR MORE FREQUENTLY.
SOON NAMAZU WILL BREAK FREE OF THE CAPSTONE COMPLETELY...
...AND TEAR THIS LAND APART!
UNBELIEVABLE!
YOU SAID IT! A GIANT CATFISH?! YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING!
NO! HE'S RIGHT!
THERE HAVE BEEN MORE EARTHQUAKES IN RECENT TIMES! WE MUST REPAIR THE STONE!
THE ROUTE WILL BE PERILOUS!
19

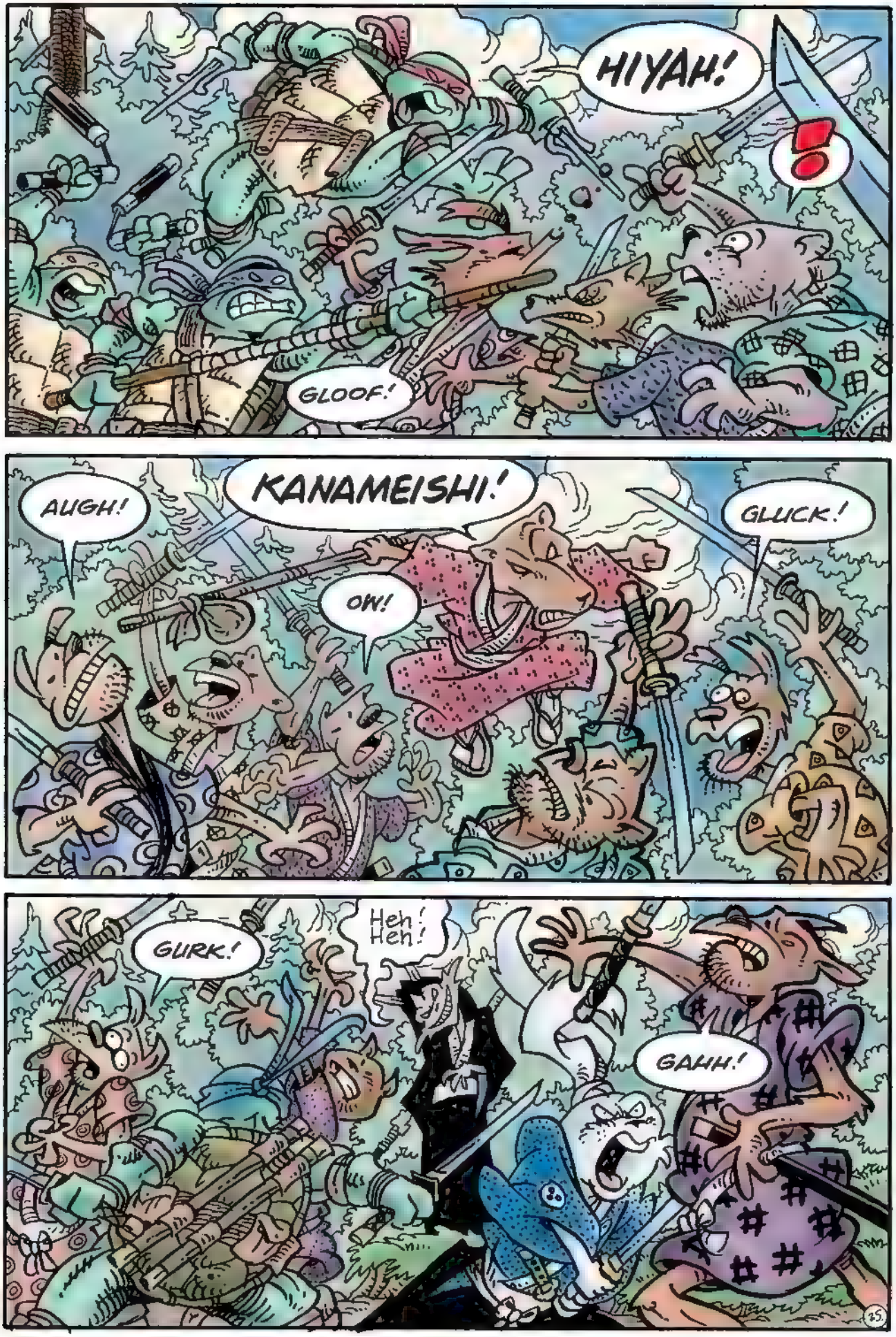

I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING WE CAN'T HANDLE.
COOL IT, DON. THIS WHOLE WORLD IS NEW TO US.
WHAT IS THIS DANGER YOU SAY WE WILL FACE?
OUR OPPONENT IS A GAUNT FIGURE OF UNIMAGINABLE EVIL WHO DELUDES HIMSELF INTO BELIEVING HE IS A SERVANT OF THE TEN THOUSAND GODS OF OUR LAND.
DO YOU KNOW OF WHOM I SPEAK?
JEI!
IS THAT THEM?
Yes.


THAT LONG-EARED SAMURAI FIGHTS LIKE A DEMON!
I'll take care of him. The others, though, are unknown to me.
THEY LOOK TOUGH!
FEH! THEY'RE NO MATCH FOR ALL OF US!
I gathered together all you brigands in this area. Your numbers should be more than enough to overwhelm those strangers.
YOU PROMISED US TREASURES BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION. THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THEY ARE CARRYING ANYTHING OF VALUE.
Not all treasures are tangible.
WELL, WE WANT TO BECOME RICH! SO FAR YOU'VE GIVEN US NOTHING BUT EMPTY PROMISES.
I am an emissary of the Gods. They send me forth to destroy evil in this land.
21

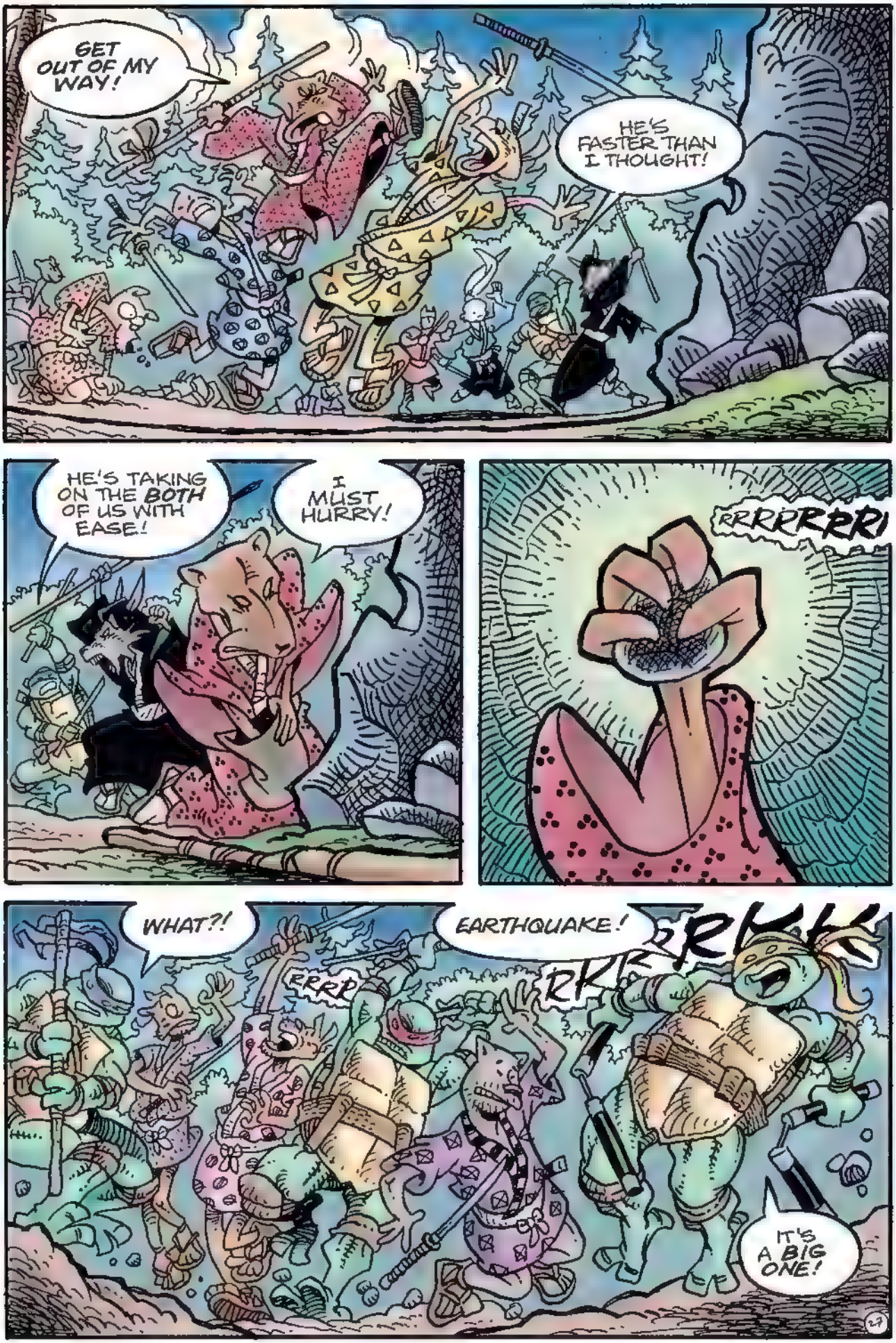
This country is on the verge of destruction. If there is no more land, there is no more evil. That is why we must stop them.
You help me do the work of the Gods!
YOU'RE INSANE! I'M LEAVING! WHO'S COMING WITH ME?
No one leaves!
Haaah--
Gyahh!
SHOOP!
AH-AH-AH-GAAAAAHHH!
22

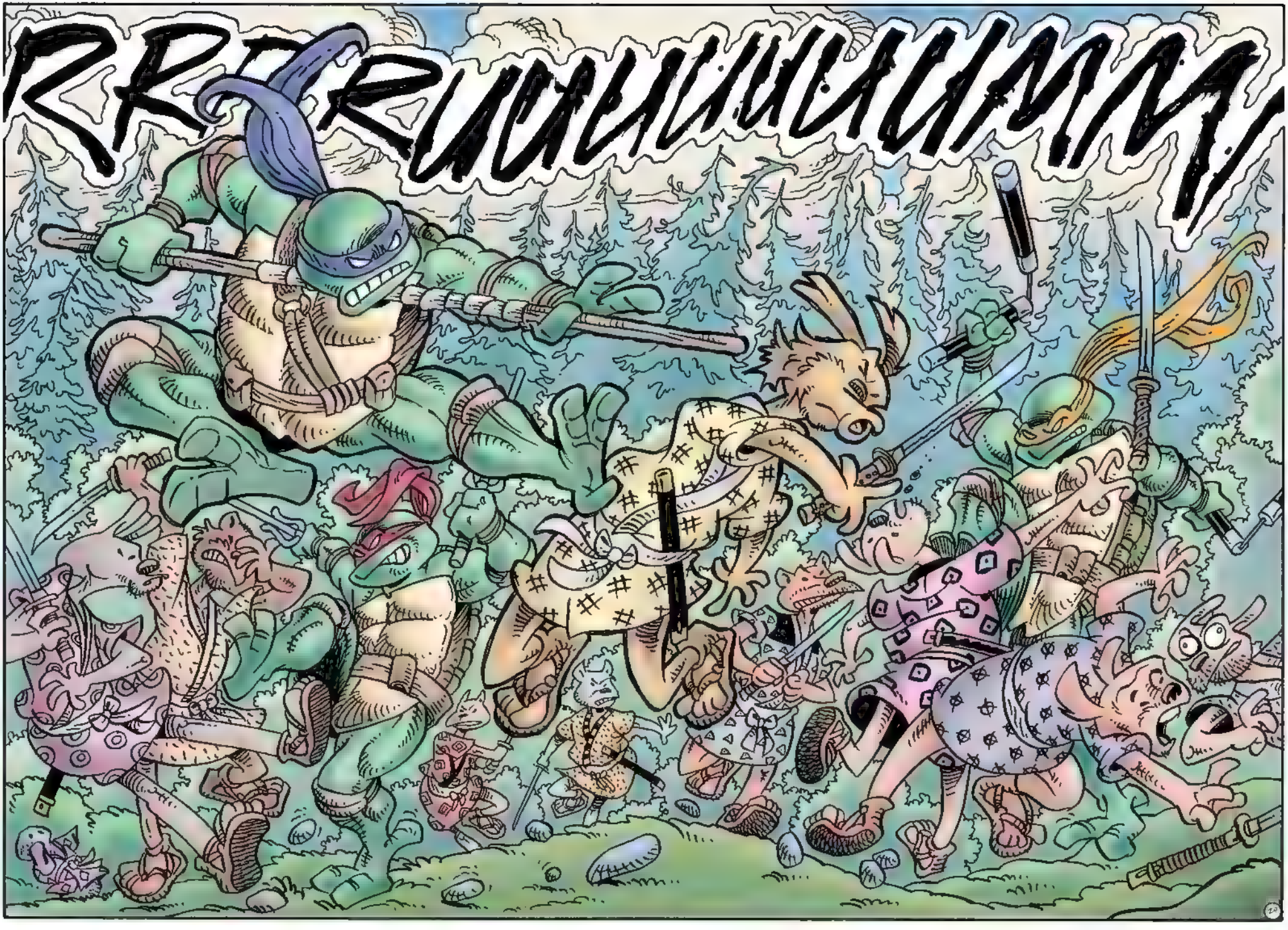
If you will not follow me through greed--
--you will follow me through fear.
Will anyone else leave?
I thought not.
Come on.
We must arrive at Kashima Shrine before they do.
23

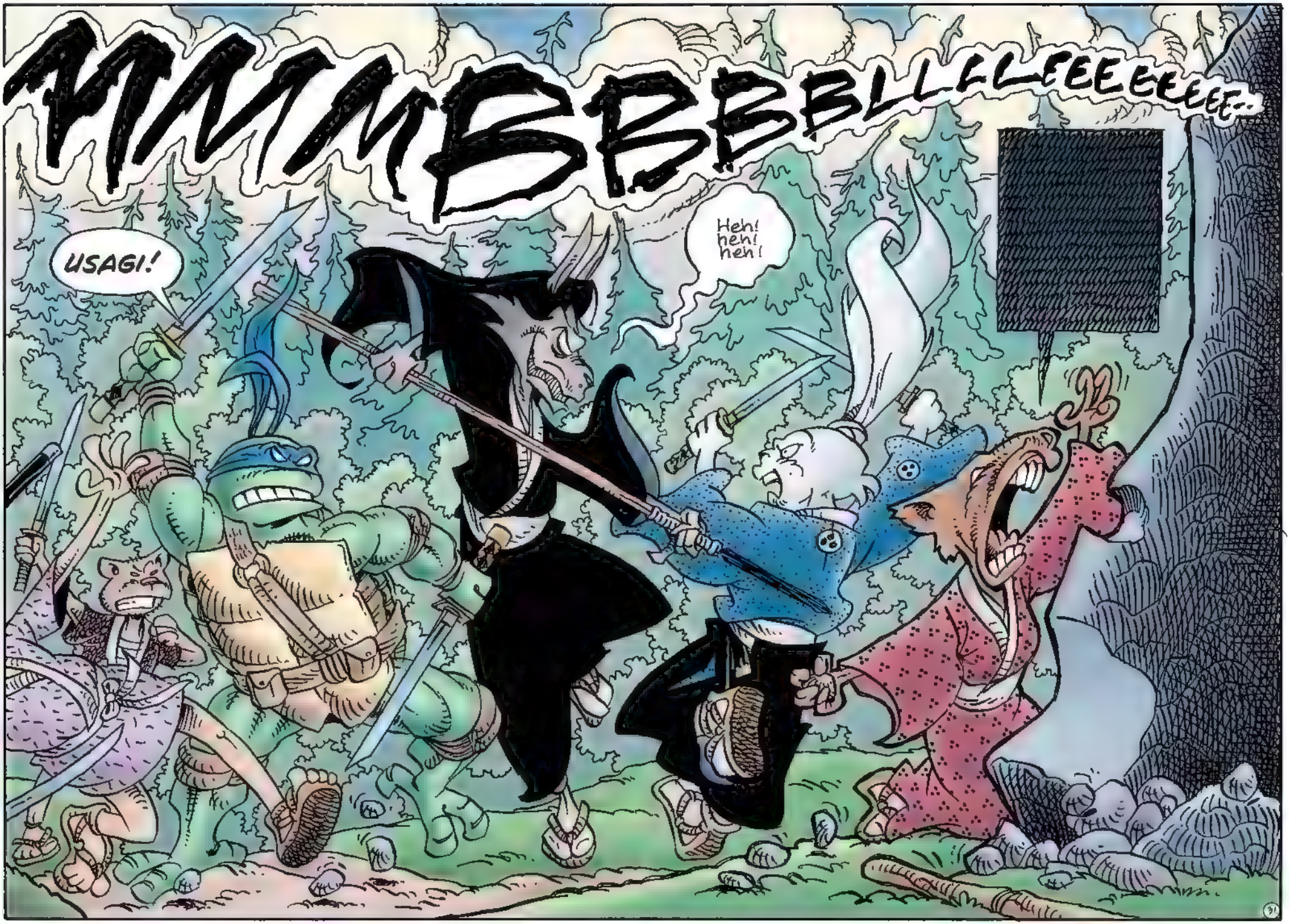

LATER...
IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE ARRIVED.
YES. KASHIMA SHRINE.
WOW! IMPRESSIVE!
THAT WAS PRETTY EASY.
YEAH. I THOUGHT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A LOT MORE DIFFICULT.
YEAH, WITH THE FATE OF THE COUNTRY AND ALL THAT.
IT'S ACTUALLY A BIT OF A LET-DOWN.
WHAT'S THAT?
UH-OH! WE SPOKE TOO SOON!
HHIIYAAAHHH!
Heh! Heh! Heh!
24

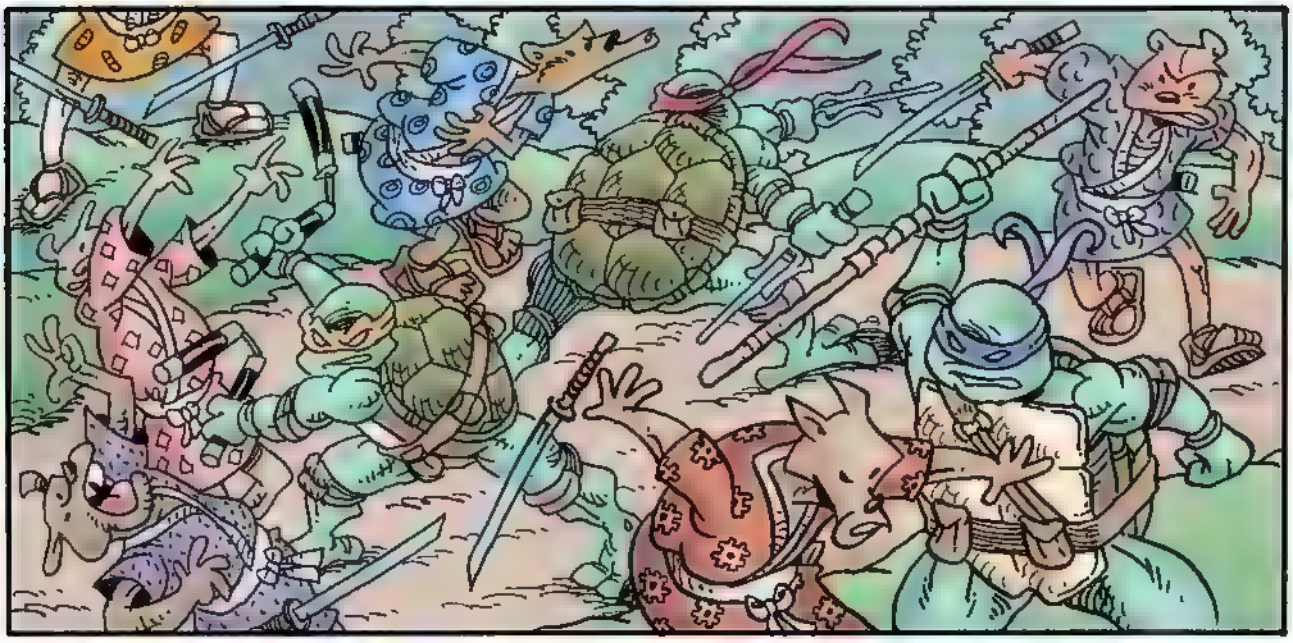

HIYAH!
!
GLOOF!
AUGH!
KANAMEISHI!
GLUCK!
OW!
GURK!
Heh! Heh!
GAHH!

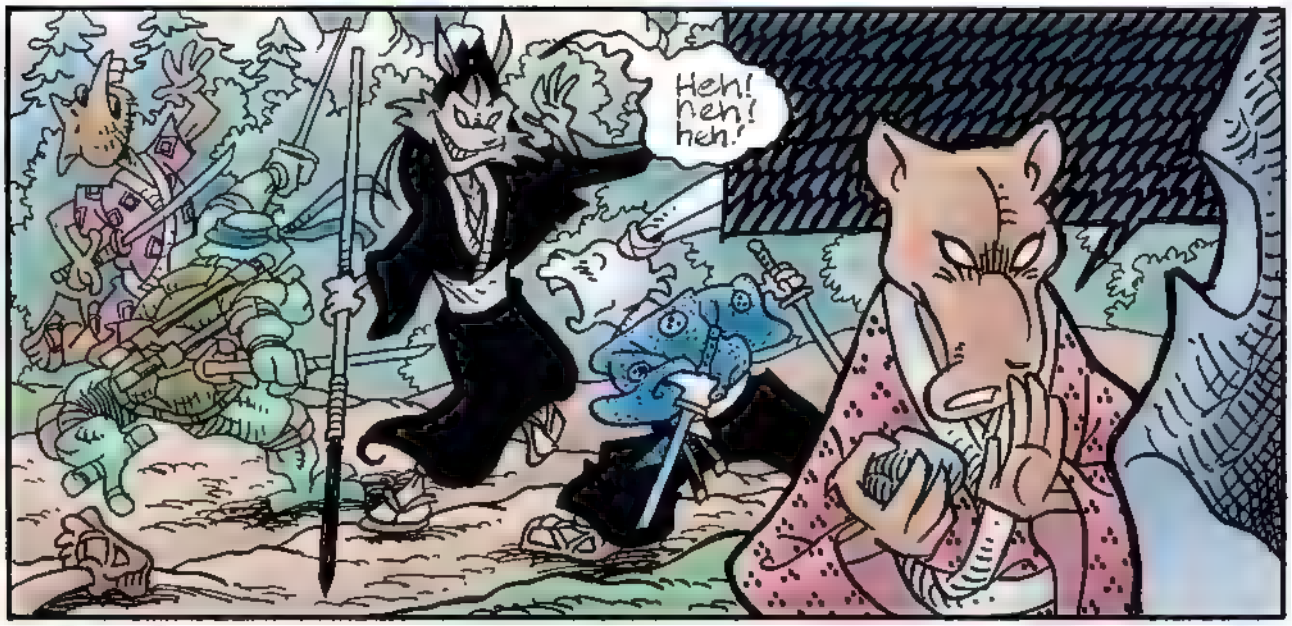
JE!-- THE BLADE OF THE GODS!
HE'S THE LEADER OF THIS BUNCH? HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH!
GURK!
BONK!
FLOOO!
26


GET OUT OF MY WAY!
HE'S FASTER THAN I THOUGHT!
HE'S TAKING ON THE BOTH OF US WITH EASE!
I MUST HURRY!
RRRRRRRI
WHAT?!
EARTHQUAKE!
RRRR
RKRRRKK
IT'S A BIG ONE!

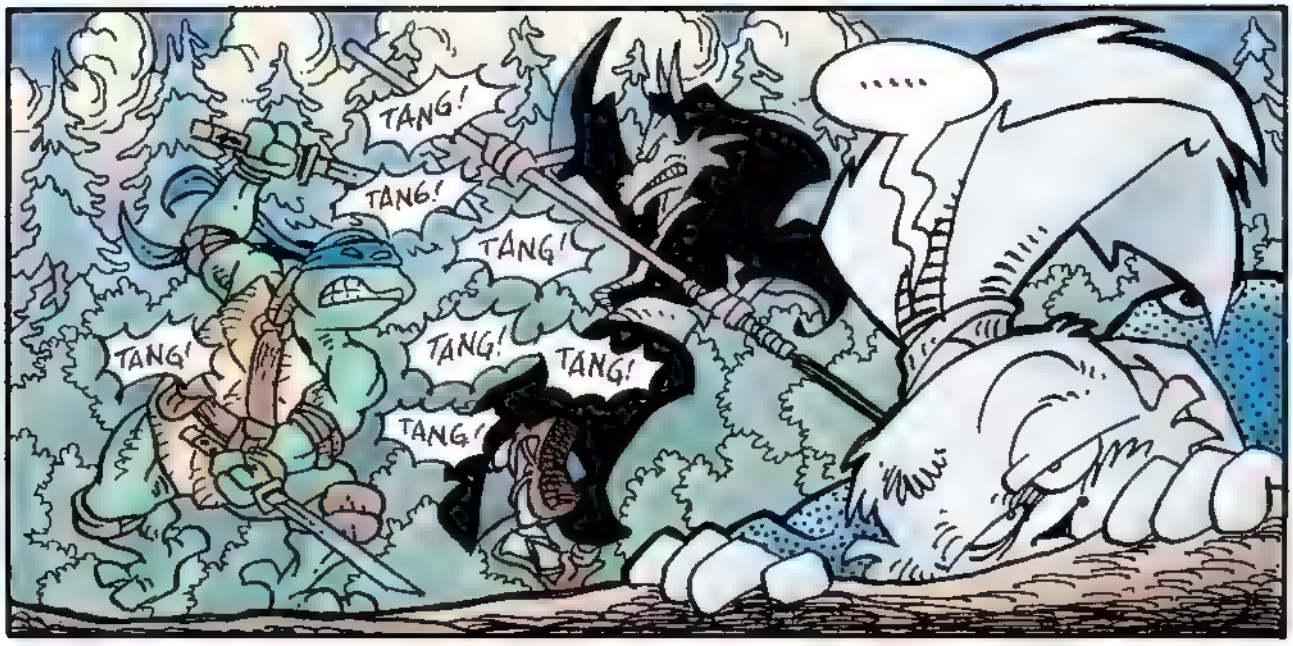

RRRRUUU


MMMBBBBLLLLEEEEEEEE...
USAGI!
Heh! heh! heh!

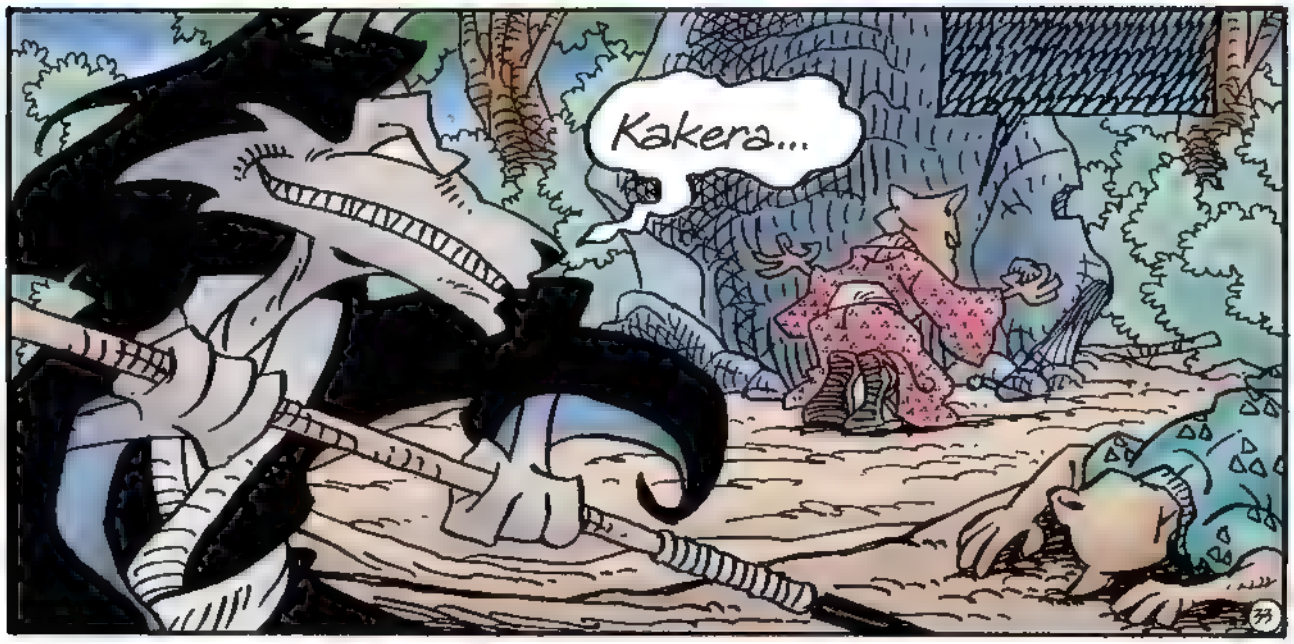



Heh! heh! heh!

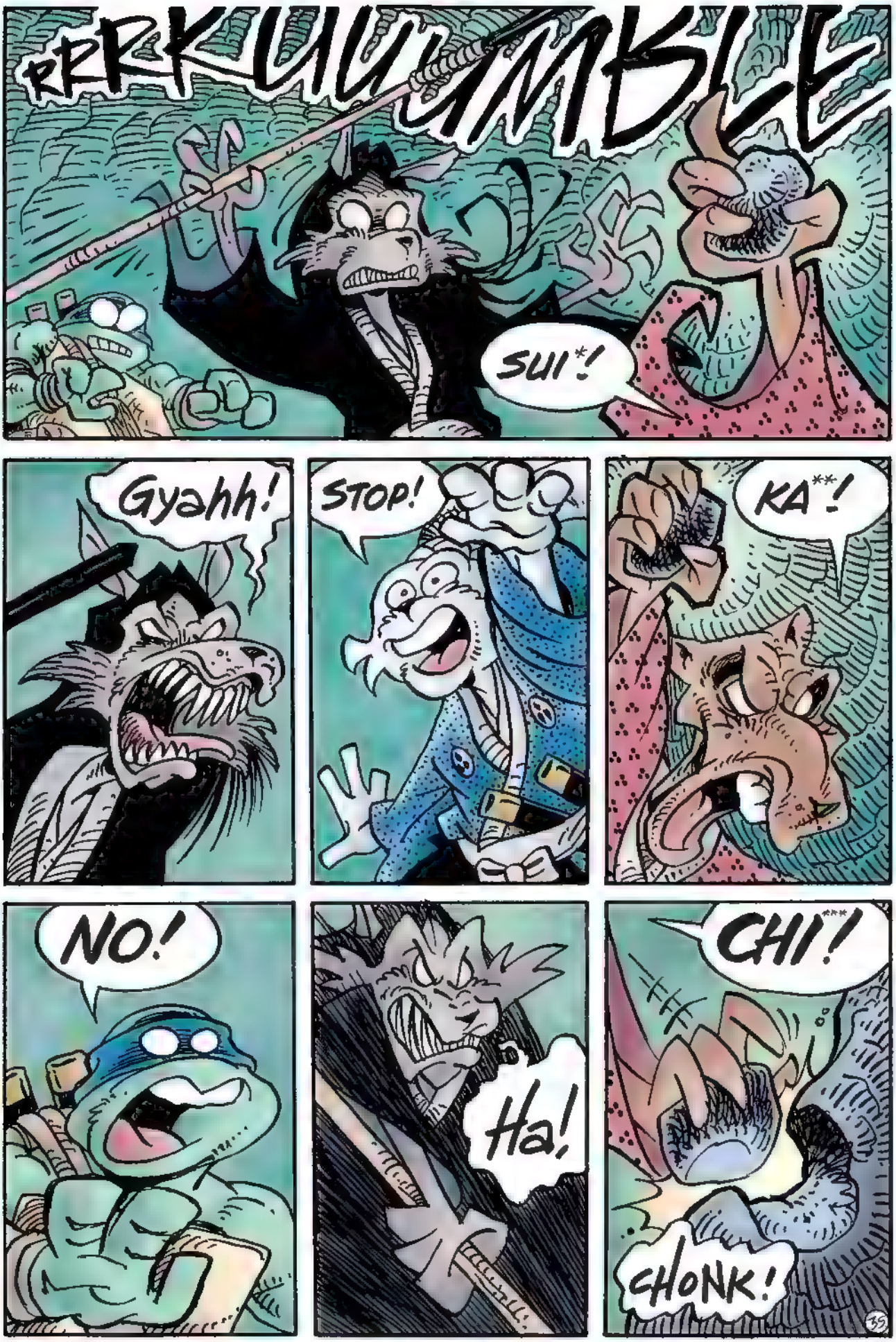
USAGI!
UH--!
WOK!
Ha!
I'VE GOT YOUR BACK!
32


TANG!
TANG!
TANG!
TANG!
TANG!
TANG!
TANG!
.....

GLOK!
OW!

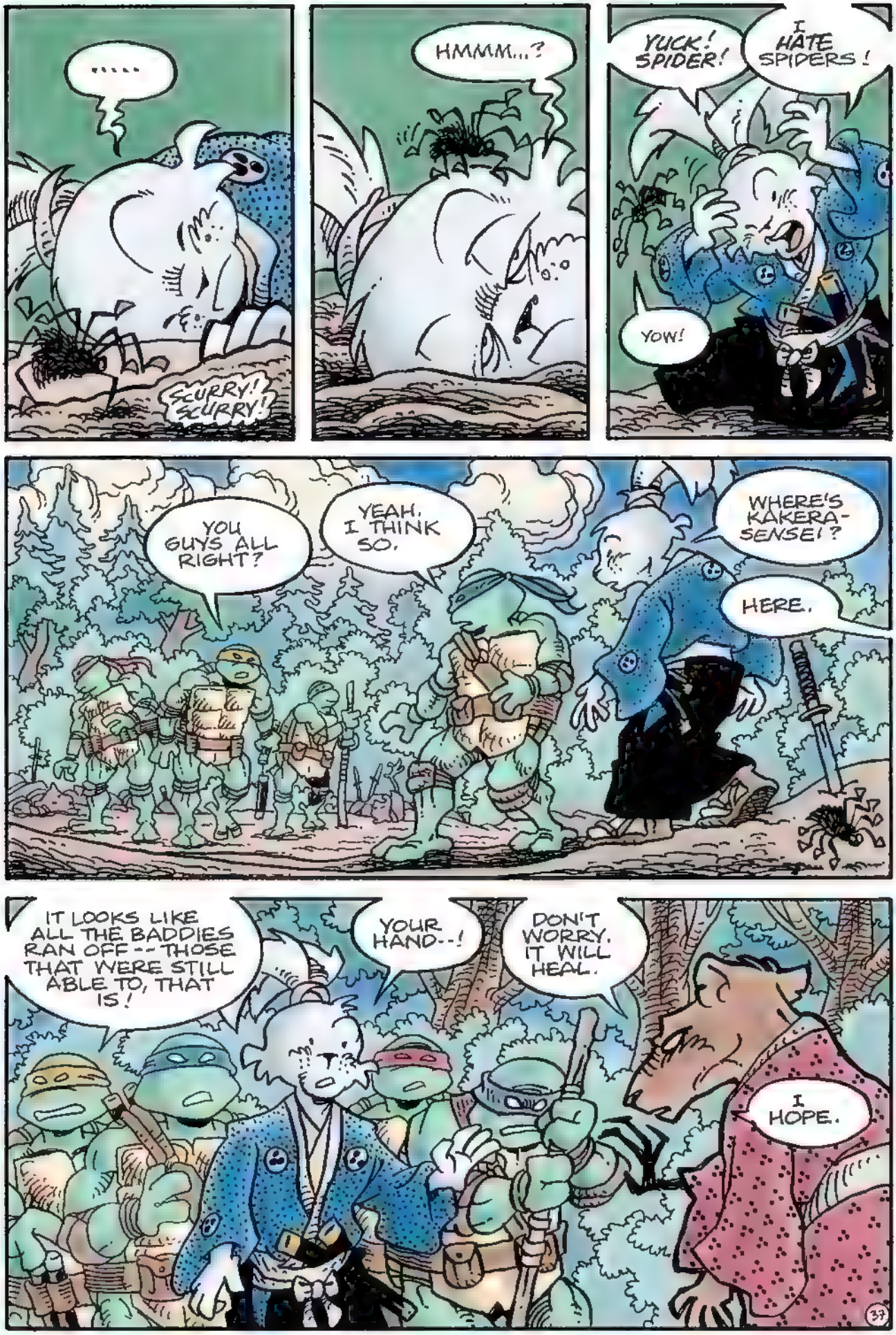

Kakera...
33

*HEAVEN

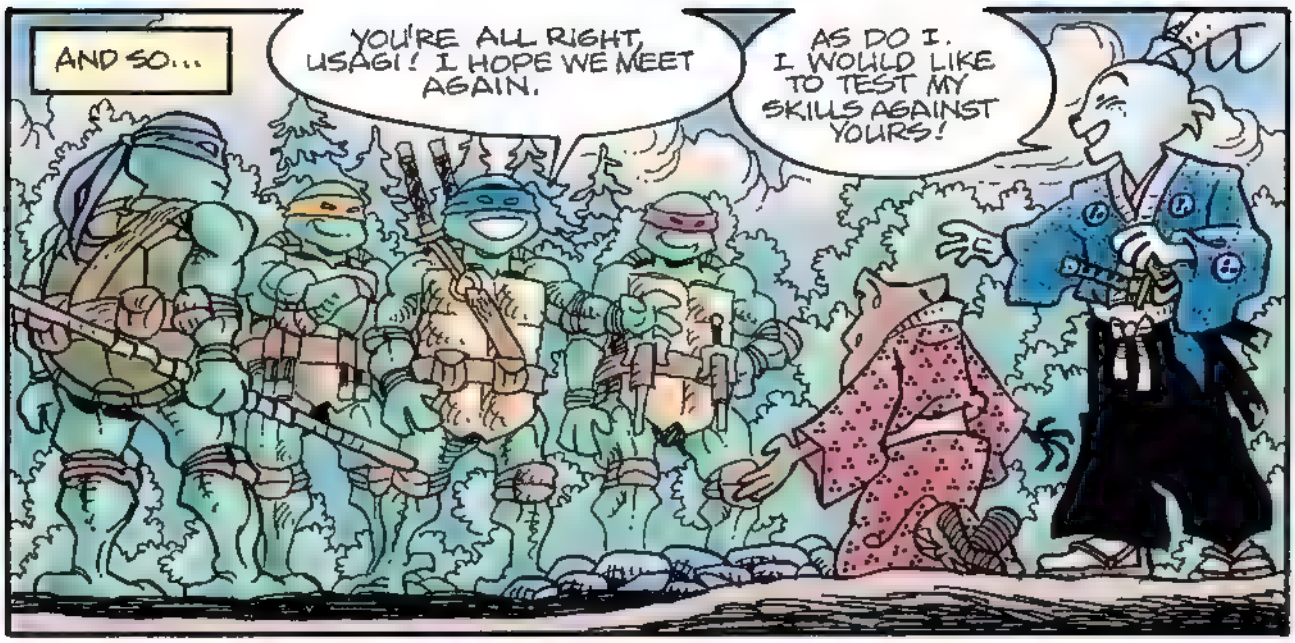


*WATER **FIRE ***EARTH

BAKADOON!
FLOOOOMM!
SWISHHH..!


.....
SCURRY! SCURRY!
HMMM...?
YUCK! SPIDER!
I HATE SPIDERS!
YOW!
YOU GUYS ALL RIGHT?
YEAH, I THINK SO.
WHERE'S KAKERA-SENSEI?
HERE.
IT LOOKS LIKE ALL THE BADDIES RAN OFF -- THOSE THAT WERE STILL ABLE TO, THAT IS!
YOUR HAND--!
DON'T WORRY. IT WILL HEAL.
I HOPE.
37

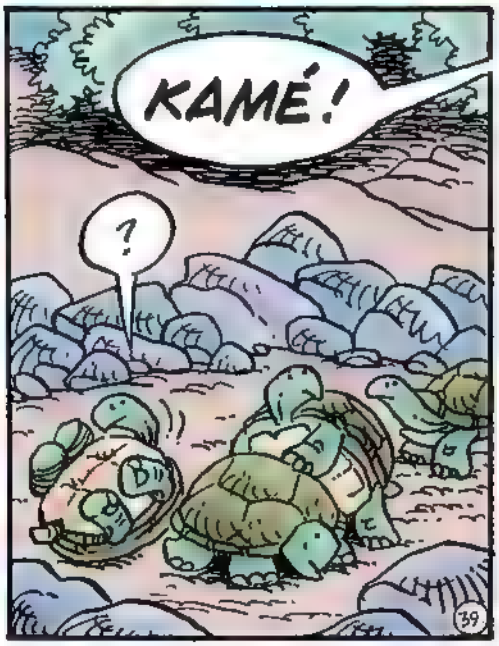
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE STONE?
IT PLUNGED ITSELF DEEPER INTO THE EARTH, PINNING NAMAZU ALL THE MORE SECURELY. THAT SMALL BIT IS ALL THAT IS EXPOSED ON THE SURFACE NOW.
AND THAT BROKEN SPEAR IS ALL THAT'S LEFT OF JEI, HUH?
GOOD RIDDANCE.
SO, THE COUNTRY IS SAFE? THE DANGER IS PAST?
YES. THANKS TO ALL OF YOU.
NOW THERE IS NO NEED FOR THE FOUR OF YOU TO REMAIN.
I DON'T KNOW. I'D LIKE TO EXPLORE THIS LAND A BIT.
THAT WILL BE FOR ANOTHER TIME.
38


AND SO...
YOU'RE ALL RIGHT, USAGI! I HOPE WE MEET AGAIN.
AS DO I. I WOULD LIKE TO TEST MY SKILLS AGAINST YOURS!

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT, BUDDY!
I LIKE THIS GUY'S CONFIDENCE! I CAN LEARN A LOT FROM HIM IN LEADING MY BROTHERS.

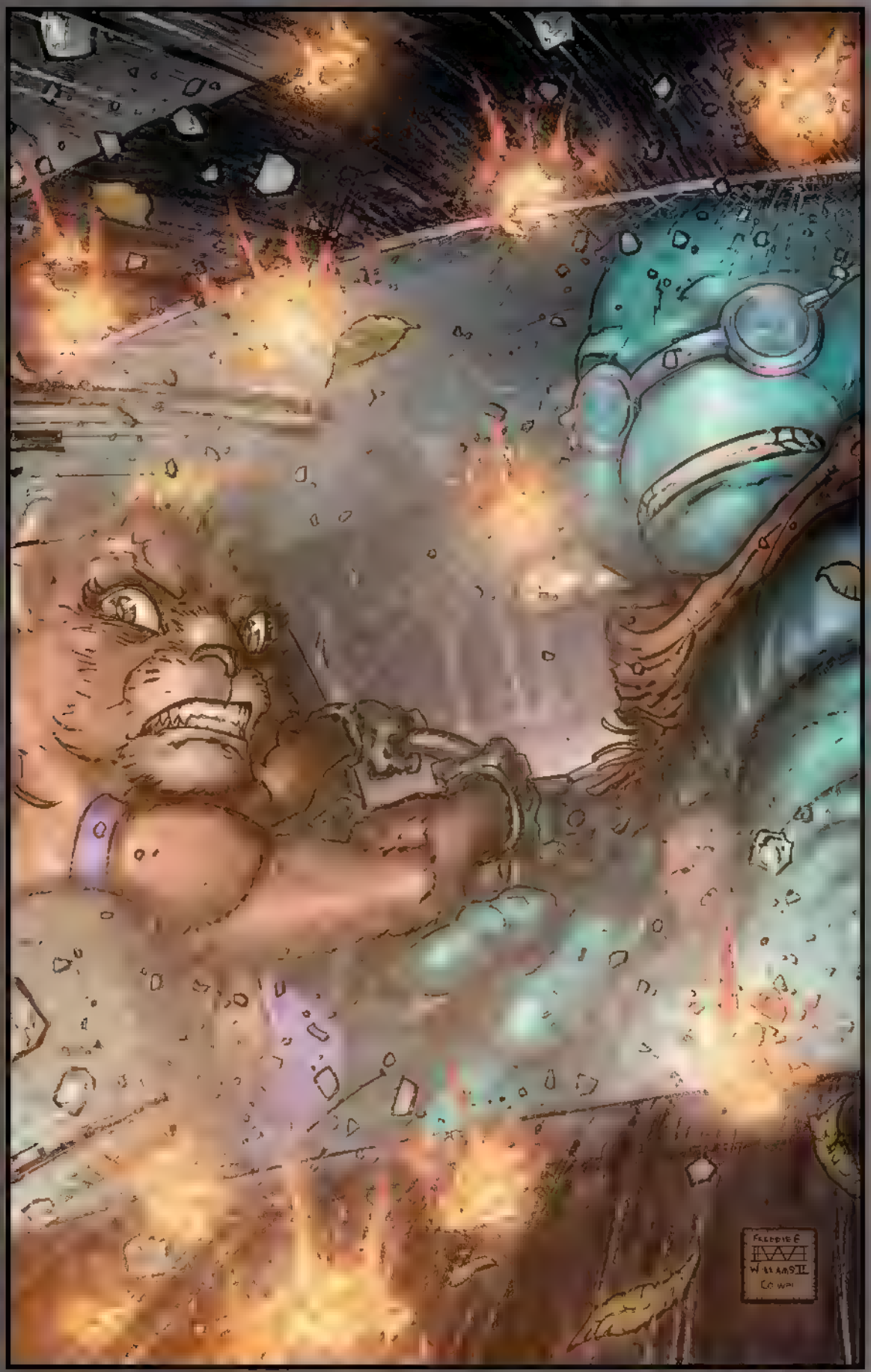
HYAH!

KU! CHI! KA! SUI! FU!


KAMÉ!
?
39

WHERE DID THEY GO?
BACK TO WHERE THEY ARE NEEDED.
I HAD BETTER GET YOU GUYS TO A POND.
THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY COUNTRY.
FAREWELL, KAKERA-SENSEI.
FAREWELL, USAGI-SAN...
...UNTIL I NEED YOU AGAIN.
完

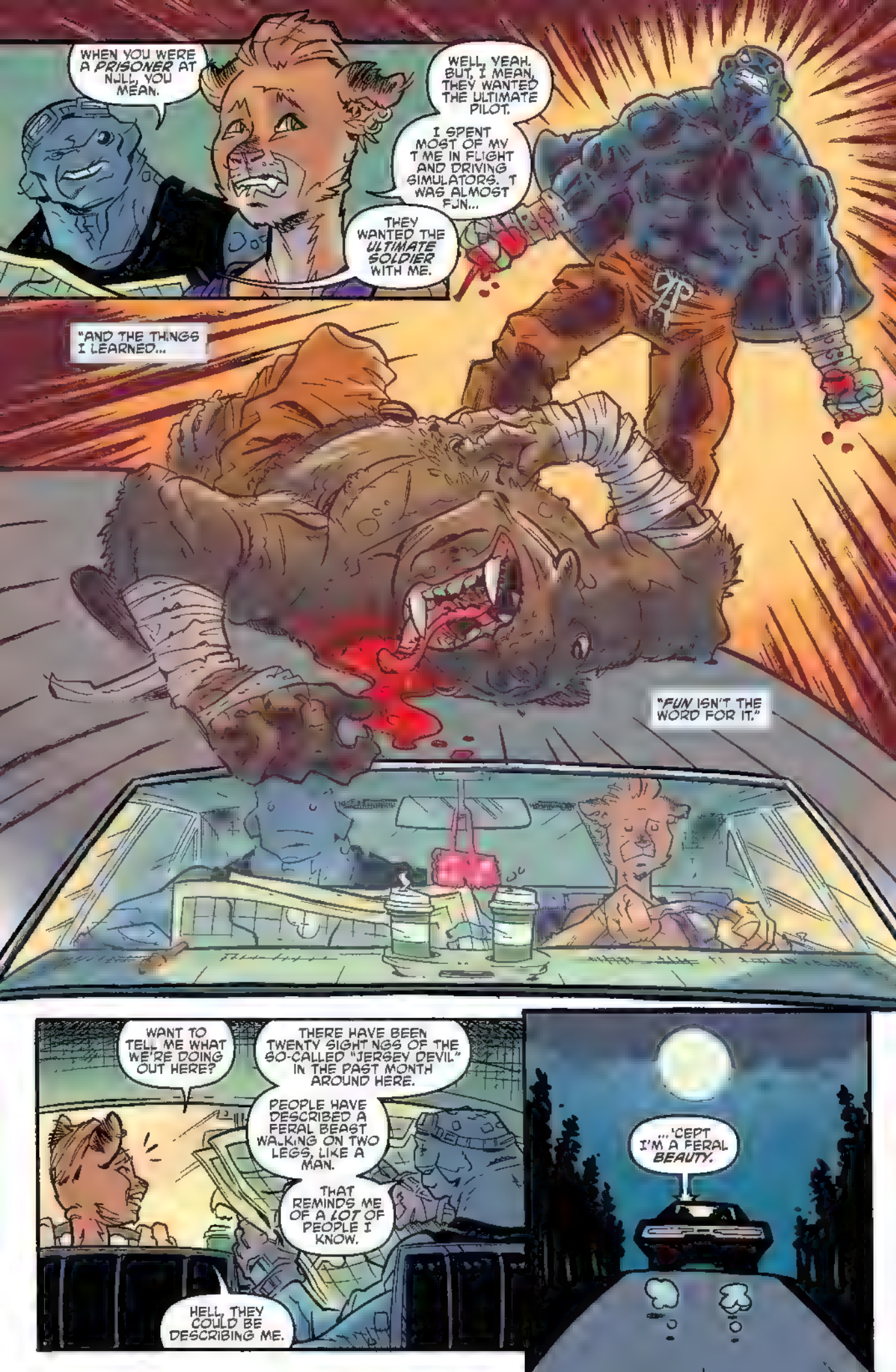
ART BY DRUID PETERSON



UNIVERSE #11
"THE JERSEY DEVIL"

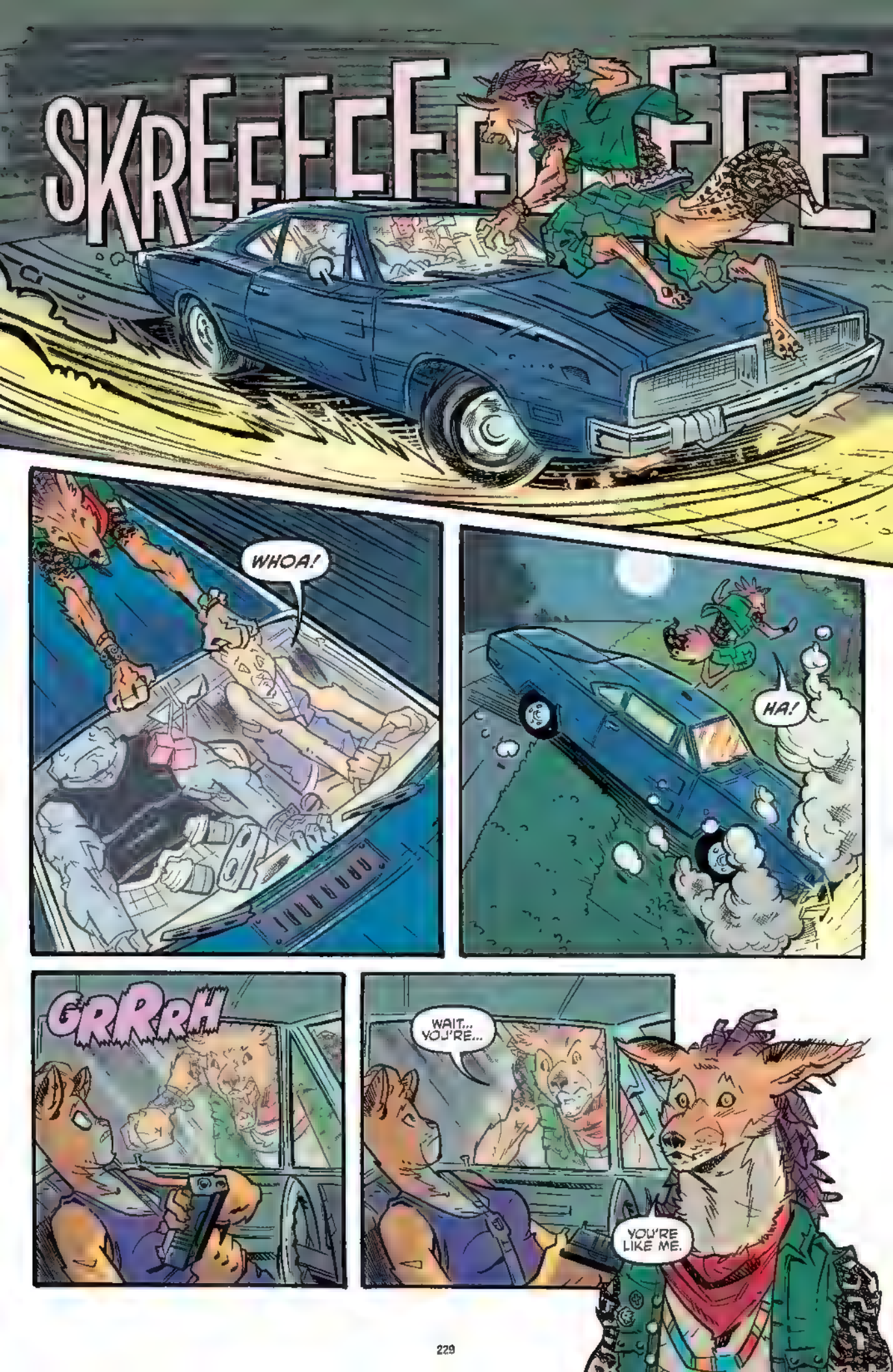
FREDDIE E. WILLIAMS II

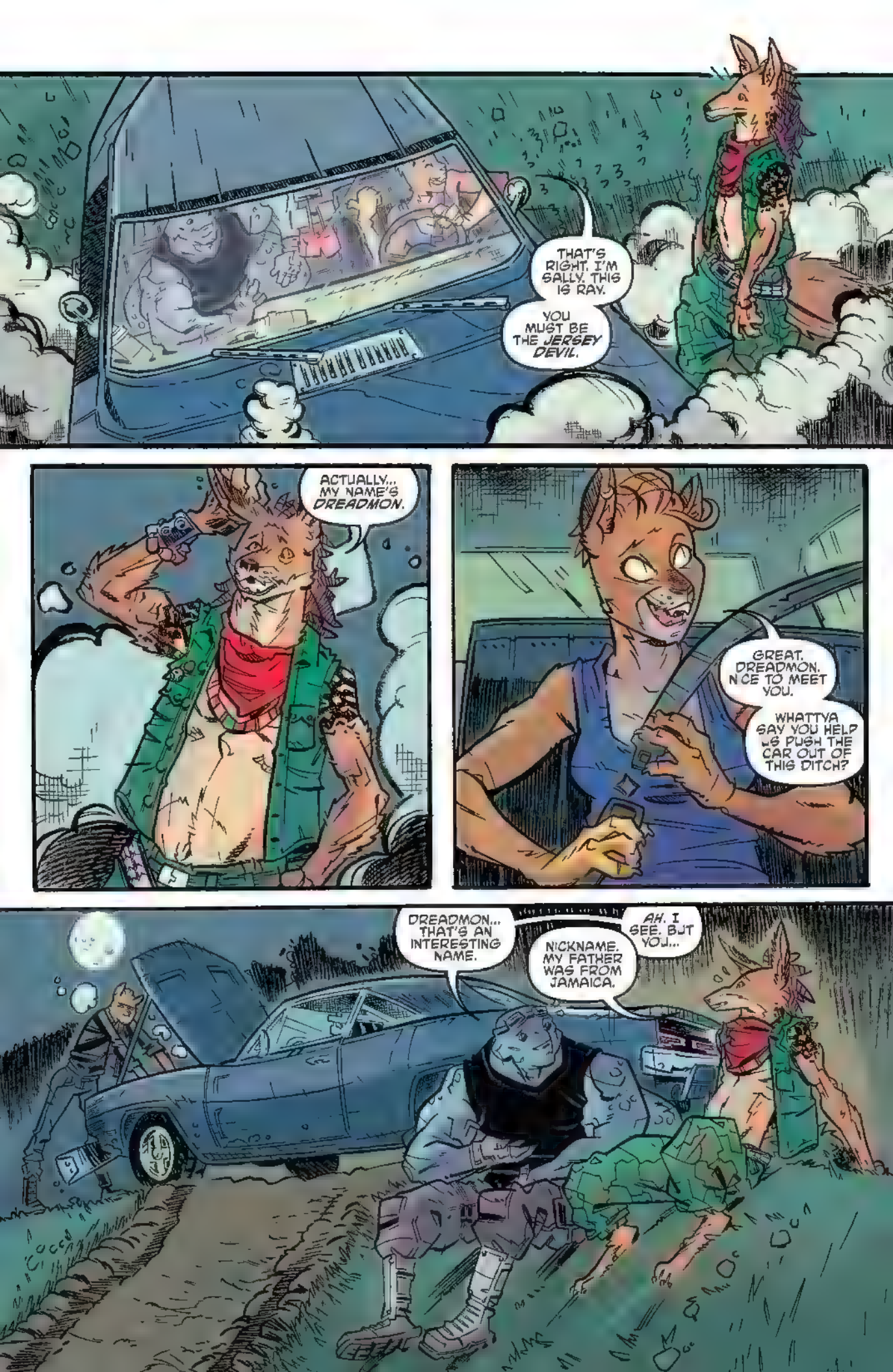
YEEE-HAH!
YOU'RE GOING TO GET US PULLED OVER, SALLY.
NO WAY, RAY. I MADE A FEW UPGRADES—INCLUDING A RADAR DETECTOR.
FIRST SIGHTING!
I THOUGHT MODERN HIGHWAY POLICE HAD RADAR DETECTOR-DETECTORS...
THEY DO.
WHICH IS WHY I ALSO INSTALLED A RADAR DETECTOR-DETECTOR-DETECTOR.
BE SERIOUS.
I AM! YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE THE THINGS I PICKED UP WHEN I WAS AT NULL.


WHEN YOU WERE A PRISONER AT NJLL, YOU MEAN.
WELL, YEAH. BUT, I MEAN, THEY WANTED THE ULTIMATE PILOT.
I SPENT MOST OF MV T ME IN FLIGHT AND DRIVING SIMULATORS. T WAS ALMOST FUN...
THEY WANTED THE ULTIMATE SOLDIER WITH ME.
"AND THE THINGS I LEARNED...
"FUN ISN'T THE WORD FOR IT."
WANT TO TELL ME WHAT WE'RE DOING OUT HERE?
THERE HAVE BEEN TWENTY SIGHT NGS OF THE SO-CALLED "JERSEV DEVIL" IN THE PAST MONTH AROUND HERE.
PEOPLE HAVE DESCRIBED A FERAL BEAST WALKING ON TWO LEGS, LIKE A MAN.
THAT REMINDS ME OF A LOT OF PEOPLE I KNOW.
HELL, THEY COULD BE DESCRIBING ME.
...'CEPT I'M A FERAL BEAUTY.

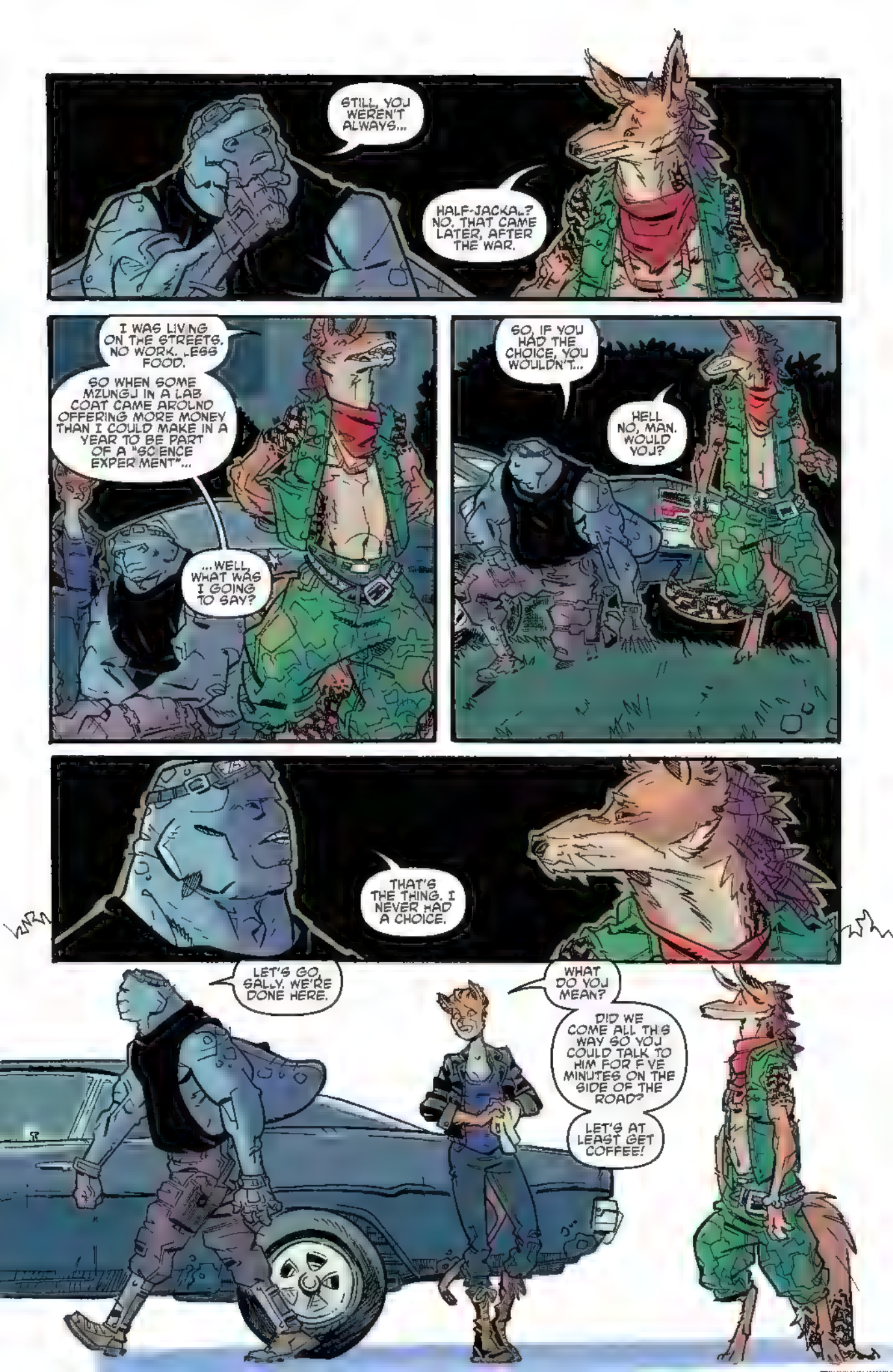
NEARBY...
I WANT THE SUBJECT RECAPTURED IMMEDIATELY, FIST.
THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE CALLED US IN THE DAY IT ESCAPED.
AND I WANT IT ALIVE. DO YOU HEAR ME?
WE'RE PROFESSIONALS, MA'AM.
WELL-PAID PROFESSIONALS.
YEAH...
fsssssss
GRAAH

SO, SAY WE FIND H M. HER. IT. WHATEVER. WHAT THEN?
WE GET THEM TO JOIN THE MUTANIMALS.
OH, JUST LIKE THAT? COME ON, RAY. WE DON'T EVEN OFFER A DENTAL PLAN.
WE OFFER COMMUNITY. FRIENDSHIP. A CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR ALL MUTANTS, EVERYWHERE.
AND ALSO, WE... WE NEED AS MUCH HELP AS WE CAN GET
THAT BUSINESS WITH SLASH. THAT WAS JUST THE OVERTURE. WHAT COMES NEXT...
WE'LL GET HIM BACK, RAY. COUNT ON—
LOOK OUT!


SKREEEEEEEEEE
WHOA!
HA!
GRRRH
WAIT... YOU'RE...
YOU'RE LIKE ME.


THAT'S RIGHT. I'M SALLY. THIS IS RAY.
YOU MUST BE THE JERSEY DEVIL.
ACTUALLY... MY NAME'S DREADMON.
GREAT, DREADMON. NICE TO MEET YOU.
WHATTYA SAY YOU HELP US PUSH THE CAR OUT OF THIS DITCH?
DREADMON... THAT'S AN INTERESTING NAME.
NICKNAME. MY FATHER WAS FROM JAMAICA.
AH. I SEE. BUT YOU...

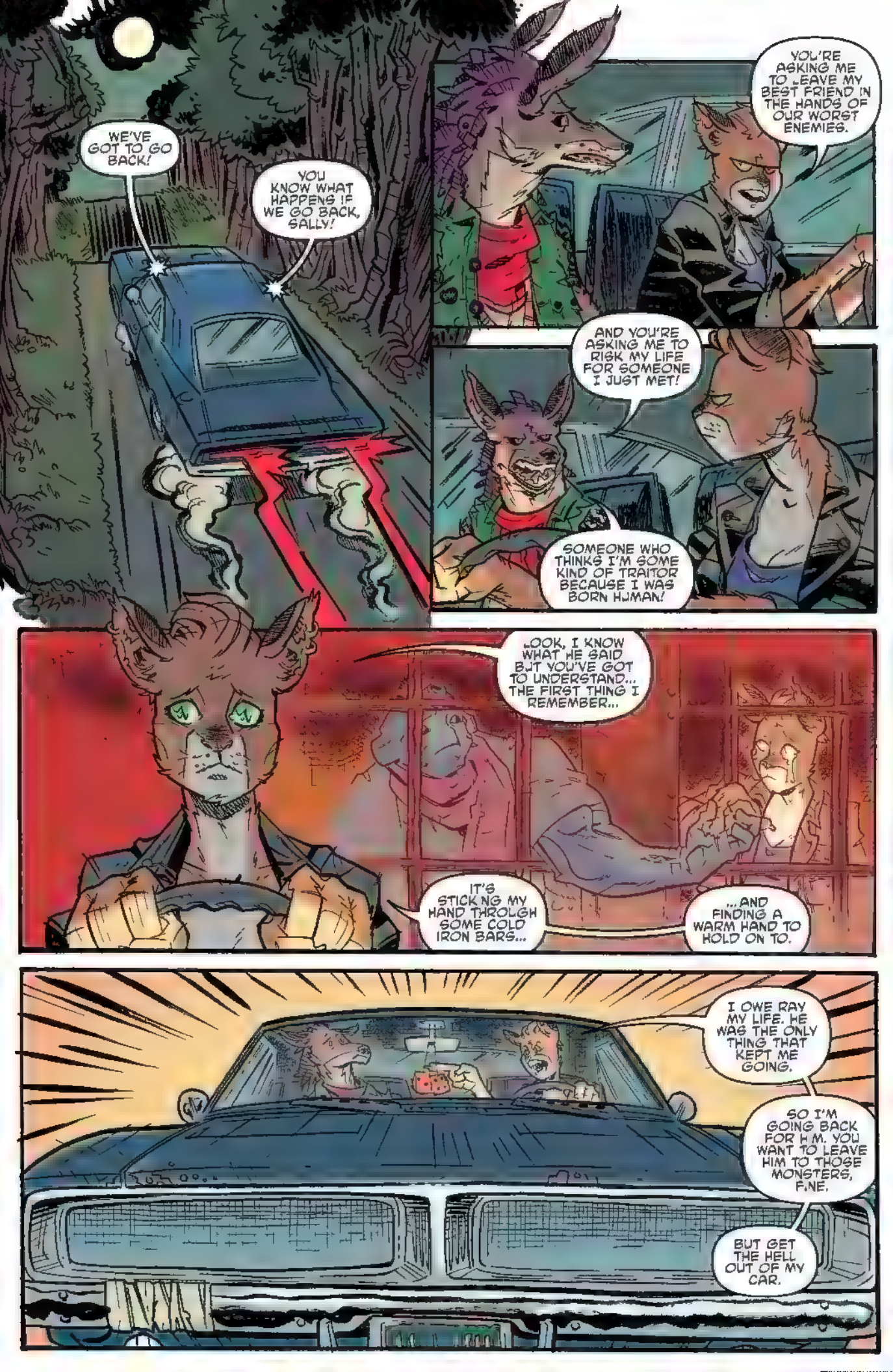
"I GREW UP IN THE CONGO.
"IN A LITTLE VILLAGE NOBODY REMEMBERS THE NAME OF, SINCE THE UNITED REVOLUTIONARY FRONT BURNED IT TO THE GROUND.
"I WAS JUST LUCKY THEY WERE LOOKING FOR MORE SOLDIERS. NO MATTER HOW YOUNG.
"I DID MANY THINGS THAT I HAD TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH."
I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL. I GREW UP IN A CAGE.
THE FIRST THING I LEARNED WAS NOT TO TRY AND ESCAPE.
THE SECOND WAS HOW TO FIGHT.


STILL, YOU WEREN'T ALWAYS...
HALF-JACKAL? NO. THAT CAME LATER, AFTER THE WAR.
I WAS LIVING ON THE STREETS. NO WORK. LESS FOOD.
SO WHEN SOME MZUNGU IN A LAB COAT CAME AROUND OFFERING MORE MONEY THAN I COULD MAKE IN A YEAR TO BE PART OF A "SCIENCE EXPERIMENT"...
...WELL, WHAT WAS I GOING TO SAY?
SO, IF YOU HAD THE CHOICE, YOU WOULDN'T...
HELL NO, MAN. WOULD YOU?
THAT'S THE THING. I NEVER HAD A CHOICE.
LET'S GO, SALLY. WE'RE DONE HERE.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
DID WE COME ALL THIS WAY SO YOU COULD TALK TO HIM FOR FIVE MINUTES ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD?
LET'S AT LEAST GET COFFEE!

I USED TO THINK HOB'S PREJUDICE AGAINST HUMAN-BORN MUTANTS WAS SHORTSIGHTED AND RIDICULOUS.
BUT NOW I SEE WHY HE THINKS THAT WAY.
YOU CAN'T MEAN THAT! WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
I VOLUNTEERED TO GET STUCK WITH A NEEDLE. NOT TO BECOME...
A MONSTER?
I WASN'T GOING TO SAY THAT.
JUST... ENOUGH. THERE ARE TOO FEW OF US TO WORRY ABOUT WHO CAME FROM WHAT.
THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS...
...THE FOUR GUYS WHO ARE GONNA GET A SWEET BONUS FOR BRINGING IN TWO EXTRA MUTANTS ON NULL'S WANTED LIST.

OVER MY DEAD BODY.
SUITS ME. JACKAL-BOY'S THE ONLY ONE NULL WANTS ALIVE, ANYWAY.
WATCH OUT!
RAY!
THUK
THUK
THUK
CAR'S RUNNING! COME ON!
DRIVE!

NOT SO FAST.
VOOOOM
BAD TIME TO HAVE REAR-WHEEL DRIVE.
BLAM
WHY YOU...
SA..LY...
GO!
VROOOOM


WE'VE GOT TO GO BACK!
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS IF WE GO BACK, SALLY!
YOU'RE ASKING ME TO LEAVE MY BEST FRIEND IN THE HANDS OF OUR WORST ENEMIES.
AND YOU'RE ASKING ME TO RISK MY LIFE FOR SOMEONE I JUST MET!
SOMEONE WHO THINKS I'M SOME KIND OF TRAITOR BECAUSE I WAS BORN HUMAN!
LOOK, I KNOW WHAT HE SAID BUT YOU'VE GOT TO UNDERSTAND... THE FIRST THING I REMEMBER...
IT'S STICKING MY HAND THROUGH SOME COLD IRON BARS...
...AND FINDING A WARM HAND TO HOLD ON TO.
I OWE RAY MY LIFE. HE WAS THE ONLY THING THAT KEPT ME GOING.
SO I'M GOING BACK FOR HIM. YOU WANT TO LEAVE HIM TO THOSE MONSTERS, FINE.
BUT GET THE HELL OUT OF MY CAR.

WAIT A MINUTE. THEY TURNED AROUND.
WE'RE GONNA GO THROUGH THEM LIKE PAPER!
AND LOSE OUR BONUS? FORGET THAT. DEADAIM!
GOT IT.
NO WAY. NO WAY YOU MAKE THAT SHOT.
HALF YOUR SHARE SAYS I DO.
DEAL. YOU'RE GOOD, BUT YOU'RE NOT THAT—
KA-BLAM

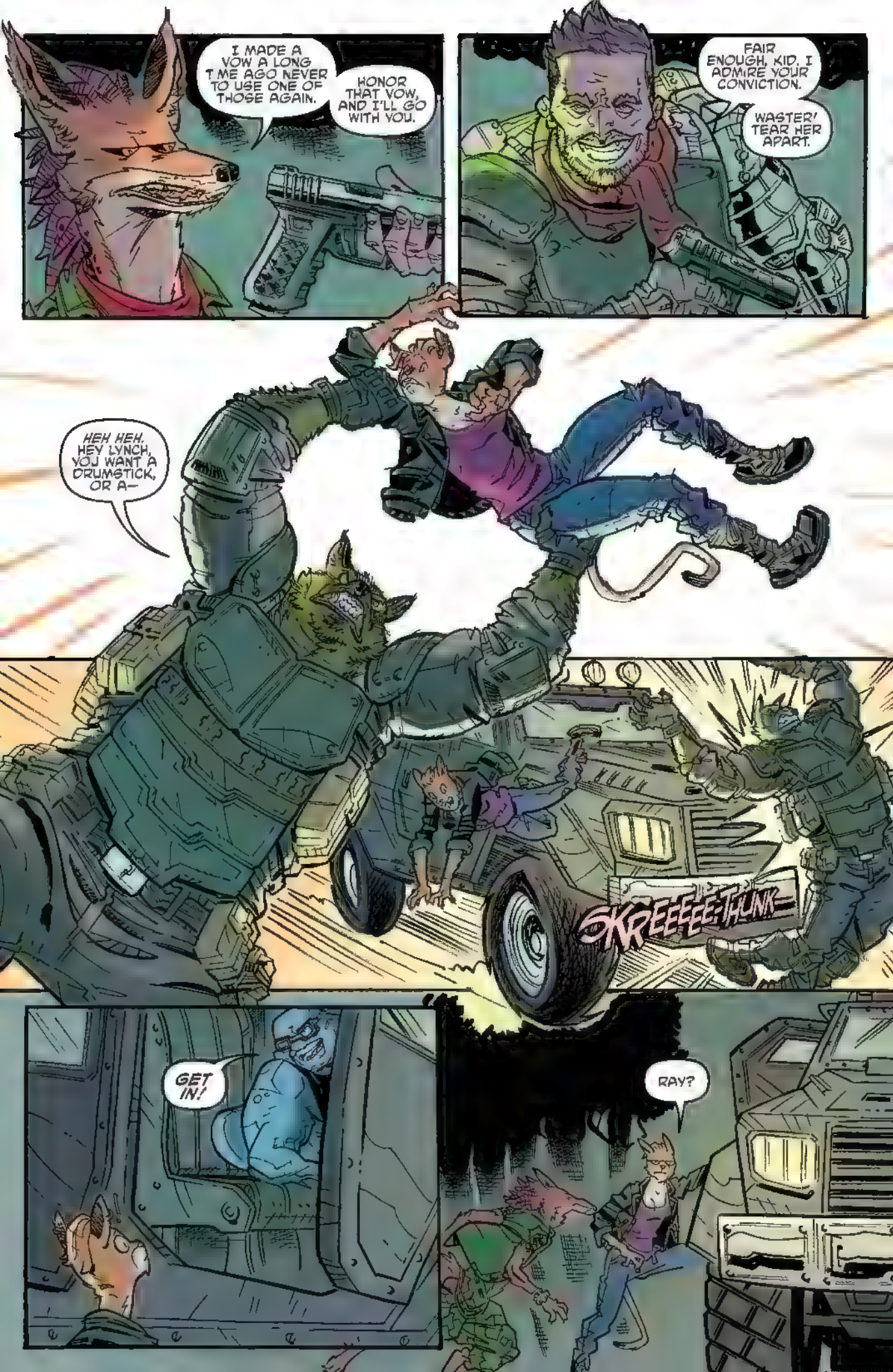
HOLD ON!
KREEEEEEGH!
YOU'RE WRONG, WASTER. I'M NOT GOOD.
I'M BAAAAD.
GOOD WORK.
WASTER. GET THEM OUT OF THERE BEFORE THAT RUSTBUCKET EXPLODES.
ON IT.

YOU DID NOT JUST CALL MY BABY A RUSTBUCKET.
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
I'M GETTING TIRED OF MISSING YOU!
SORRY.
BUT I GUESS...
...YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO GET USED TO IT.

THEN AGAIN...
...MAYBE HE WON'T.
BY THE WAY, I CAN DROP YOU BOTH BEFORE EITHER ONE OF YOU EVEN THINKS ABOUT MOVING.
EASY, DEADAIM. WE'RE NOT HERE TO KILL THEM. ESPECIALLY NOT HIM.
BRAKA
BRAK
COPY THAT, COLONEL F.ST.
WONDERFUL. NOW, LET'S CLEAR THIS LITTLE... MISUNDERSTANDING UP.
WHAT MISUNDERSTANDING?
WELL, YOU THOUGHT WE WERE HUNTING YOU. AND TO BE HONEST, WE WERE.
BUT NOT TO KILL YOU.
THEN WHY?
TO RECRUIT YOU.

YOU'RE CRAZY IF YOU THINK—
SEE, NULL HAS A VISION FOR ALL THIS. A SANER VISION THAN ALL THIS CHAOS. THAT VISION IS ORDER. A NEW ORDER.
WHAT KIND OF ORDER?
THE BEST KIND.
ONE WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS THEIR PLACE.
HUNTER AND PREY...
MASTER AND SERVANT...
fsss
HUMAN AND MUTANT.
HOW DID YOU?
OUR MUTAGEN IS PRECISELY CONTROLLED BY OUR CYBERNETIC ENHANCEMENTS. WONDERFUL TRICK FOR THE FUTURE ELITE.
FOR THE CHATTEL, THOUGH...
WE'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING CLOSER TO YOUR PERSUASION.

MASTERS... SLAVES... THIS IS ALL RIDICULOUS. I JUST WANT TO GO HOME!
AND HOME YOU'LL GO. MAYBE EVEN WITH SKIN INSTEAD OF FUR. BUT FIRST, YOU GOTTA COME WITH US.
I... ALL RIGHT, I'LL GO.
UH-UH. YOU GOTTA COME WITH US.
AND YOU GOTTA SHOW US YOU'RE PACK MATERIAL.
YOU... YOU SAID NULL WANTED US ALL ALIVE.
WELL, LIKE THE SONG SAYS... TWO OUTTA THREE AIN'T BAD.
I JUST NEED TO KNOW I CAN TRUST YOU.


I MADE A VOW A LONG TIME AGO NEVER TO USE ONE OF THOSE AGAIN.
HONOR THAT VOW, AND I'LL GO WITH YOU.
FAIR ENOUGH, KID. I ADMIRE YOUR CONVICTION.
WASTER! TEAR HER APART.
HEH HEH. HEY LYNCH, YOJ WANT A DRUMSTICK, OR A—
SKREEEEE-THUNK
GET IN!
RAY?

YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!
MY BODY CAN PRODUCE ENOUGH VENOM TO KNOCK OUT A RHINOCEROS.
PROCESSING TOXINS IS SECOND NATURE.
AND YOU STOLE MY MOVE, BACK THERE.
NOW THAT I HAD TO COME UP WITH ON MY OWN.
NO.
GLAD YOU'RE OKAY MAN, BUT THIS ISN'T OVER.
"I SUPPOSE NOT."
GRRR...
SMASH
HANG ON!

SALLY! TAKE THE WHEE...
GOT IT.
TAKE THIS, YOU MIGHT NEED IT.
I... ALL RIGHT.
SKREAK
LOOK OUT!
BLAM BLAM BLAM
NICE TRY.
FTANG FTANG
WELL... NOT REALLY.

STOP.
WHO ARE YOU KIDDING? WE BOTH KNOW YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SHOOT.
CLICK
YEAH...
HE DOESN'T NEED TO.
BLAM
IS HE...
NOT EVEN CLOSE.
ALL RIGHT, KITTY.
"TILL WE MEET AGA.N."

I... I WAS WRONG, DREADMON. YOU SHOULD COME WITH US.
WE NEED TO STICK TOGETHER. NO MATTER HOW WE BECAME WHAT WE ARE.
THEY'RE NEVER GOING TO STOP HUNTING YOU. IF IT'S NOT NULL, IT'LL BE SOMEONE ELSE.
LET THEM HUNT ME. I'LL GIVE THEM A CHASE, FOR SURE.
BACK HOME, I WAS ALWAYS RUNNING. BUT LOOK AT THIS PLACE! SO MANY POSSIBILITIES, AND THIS IS JUST A TINY PART OF THE COUNTRY.
I WANT TO BE HERE. NOW. I WANT TO RUN FREE!
BUT THAT'S WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR! SO NO MUTANT WILL EVER BE CAGED AGAIN!
THAT'S THE THING, MON. THE TWO OF YOU, YOU GREW UP IN CAGES. SAD THING, I KNOW. BUT THE WORST THING YOU COULD DO...
...IS TRADE THOSE CAGES FOR ANOTHER ONE. EVEN ONE YOU MAKE YOURSELF.

IN ANY CASE, THANK YOU. AND GOODBYE.
WELL, THERE GOES YOUR JERSEY DEVIL...
WHO'S NEXT ON THE LIST? BIGFOOT? THE LOCH NESS MONSTER?
YOU THINK YOU CAN DRIVE THIS HEAP ALL THE WAY TO SCOTLAND?
GIVE ME THREE DAYS, AND AN INFLATABLE RAFT. I'LL MAKE IT HAPPEN.
THE END.

art by AARON CONLEY
colors by JEAN-FRANCOIS BERULIEU

UNIVERSE #12
BASIC & PATH

FRENDIE & WILLIAMS II

RRaw!
RRaw
RRaw

<MY APOLOGIES, PRETTY GIRL—>
<—THAT LOOKED LIKE AN EXPENSIVE JACKET.>
<GUESS YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK DADDY FOR ANOTHER ONE—HA HA HAAAA.>
SKRREEE

I AM OROKU KARAI.
I RESURRECTED THE FOOT CLAN
I RESTORED ITS LEGACY.
<...NO WAY! >
TEACHING MYSELF A LOST MARTIAL ART AND WILLING A NINJA CLAN BACK TO LIFE REQUIRED GREAT PRECISION...
KIYAIII!
I APPRECIATE PRECISION ALL THE MORE WHEN I FIND IT IN THE WORLD.

HONK
KRANG
RRRRREEEE
RRWWWAAWAA
<WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, PRETTY GIRL?>
<YOU GOT A DEATH WISH?>
<I AM OROKU KARAI.>
<IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN SOMETHING?>
<IT MEANS THAT I WILL NOT BE INSULTED.>
<INSULTED? WHAT, YOU DON'T LIKE BEING PRETTY?>
<FINE—>
<—I CAN FIX THAT. >

HUNH!
<PATHETIC.>
SWIP
KRIK
<...AND SLOPPY.>
THRAK
WHOMP

HM. SLOPPY, BUT NOT ENTIRELY UNTRAINED.
GOOD.
CHAK
KFF

〈OKAY, IT'S CLEAR NOW THAT I SHOULD PROBABLY APOLOGIZE FOR SHOOTING YOU...〉
〈THERE'S A YAKUZA WAR GOING ON, YOU KNOW?〉
〈BIG MAN DIED, SO EVERYONE ELSE IS TRYING TO BETTER THEIR POSITIONS... AND YOU WERE JUST STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY TARGET.〉
〈YOU'RE LUCKY I JUST WINGED YOU.〉
〈IN FACT, MAYBE YOU SHOULD BE THANKING ME!〉
〈YOU. EXPECT ME. TO BE GRATEFUL— FOR YOUR INCOMPETENCE?!〉
〈WELL YEAH, I COULD'VE PUT ONE DEAD CENTER!〉
〈...STILL COULD.〉

〈BYE-BYE, GRUMPY!〉
宅急便
〈AND TAKE CARE OF THAT ARM! YOU ONLY HAVE TWO!〉
HH.
LATER. KARAI'S PENTHOUSE.
AAUUUGHHH!
THIS IS POINTLESS, OLD MAN!

BLUDGEON IS BLIND, AND I CAN'T FLY!
WE'RE NO BETTER THAN A COUPLE OF PETS FOR A SPOILED RICH GIRL, AND YOU JUST EXPECT US TO *SPAR?*
CORRECT. YOU'VE FELT SORRY FOR YOURSELVES LONG ENOUGH.
IT'S TIME TO GET BACK TO WORK.
WEREN'T YOU LISTENING, GRANDPA?
HE'S BLIND, AND *ALL* MY INSTINCTS REVOLVE AROUND FLYING! WE'RE *USELESS!*
DO NOT CALL ME "GRANDPA." YOU MAY CALL ME TOSHIRO, OR SENSEI.
I HAVE TAUGHT THE BEST OF THE FOOT CLAN, AND I WILL HAVE YOUR *RESPECT*, NOT YOUR *EXCUSES*.
YOU CAN'T FLY, KOYA, BUT NEITHER CAN I. AND I AM NO LESS DEADLY FOR IT.
AS TO THE BLINDNESS...
...ATTACK ME.
YOU'RE KIDDING.
AM I?
SHWAK

RRAAAGGGH!!
GOOD! YOU SEE? YOU DON'T NEED TO FLY TO FIGHT!
THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN EXCELLENT PUNCH–
–IF IT HAD CONNECTED. YOUR ANGER AFFECTS YOUR EFFICIENCY MORE THAN YOUR INJURIES.
A COMMON PROBLEM.
SKRRRRFF
HEY! LEAVE HER ALONE!
AH, BLUDGEON! VERY GOOD!
TRSHLAM
YOU NEARLY HIT ME!
BLINDNESS DOESN'T HOLD YOU BACK IF YOU TRUST YOUR OTHER SENSES.

YOUR ANGER IS NATURAL, KOYA, AND UNDERSTANDABLE. BUT IT MAKES YOU EASIER TO READ. WE'LL WORK ON THAT.
HMPH.
AND YOU–YOUR SENSES ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN I EXPECTED. DID YOU HEAR MY POSITION? SMELL IT?
NO.
BEFORE I WAS... THIS, I COULD SENSE EVERYTHING IN THE SEA AROUND ME.
SINCE I'VE BEEN BLINDED, THAT ABILITY SEEMS TO HAVE RETURNED.
IF I TRY HARD ENOUGH, I CAN FEEL WHERE THINGS ARE, AND–
...
MASTER TOSHIRO? SHE IS HOME. AND I SMELL... BLOOD.
VERY GOOD, BLUDGEON.
VERY GOOD~

<BLOOD LOSS, OVEREXERTION... YOU'VE BEEN OUT FOR HOURS, NOW.>
<BUT WE'VE SEEN TO YOUR WOUNDS. HOW DO YOU FEEL?>
<...ANGRY.>
<AN AMATEUR GOT THE BETTER OF ME.>
<PERHAPS IT'S A SIGN THAT YOU'VE BEEN TOO IDLE.>
<I KNOW YOU FEEL I WAS WRONG TO TAKE LEAVE FROM THE FOOT CLAN, SENSEI.>
<BUT AT THIS POINT, I'M NOT SURE WHERE MY FUTURE LIES.>
<AND THAT SURPRISES ME. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN BLESSED WITH CERTAINTY.>

<YOUR DECISION TO RETURN TO JAPAN TO SEEK A NEW PATH, TO TURN YOUR BACK ON ALL YOU'VE BUILT... IT SEEMS OUT OF CHARACTER.>
<WE ALL FACE NEW CHAPTERS IN OUR LIVES, TOSHIRO-SAN.>
<*EVEN ME*. YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO FOLLOW ME HERE.>
<I OWE YOU MORE THAN I CAN EVER REPAY. I HAD TO->
<KARAI! YOU NEED MORE TIME TO HEAL!>
<MY PRIDE WAS THE ONLY THING THE AMATEUR TRULY INJURED.>
<I'M GOING NOW. I *WILL* FIND THIS WOMAN AND THOSE SHE WORKS FOR.>
<AND WHEN I DO->
<-I'LL HAVE SATISFACTION.>
<OH, KARAI. I DO HOPE THAT THAT'S SOMEDAY TRUE.>

LATER...
THE ROOFTOP GARDEN OF HAYASHI TORU.
<...YOU DON'T USUALLY RETURN TO ME WITH SCRAPES AND BRUISES, GRANDDAUGHTER.>
<WERE KENJI'S MEN FIERCER THAN I BELIEVED?>
<NO, GRANDFATHER. THERE WAS AN UNEXPECTED COMPLICATION, THAT'S ALL.>
<I WINGED THIS WOMAN DURING THE HIT, AND SHE TURNED OUT TO BE KIND OF BADASS. SAID HER NAME WAS... WHAT WAS IT... OROKU KARAI?>
<SHE ACTUALLY CHASED ME DOWN AND KNOCKED ME OFF MY BIKE.>
<OROKU KARAI, YOU SAY?>

<SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE HEARD OF HER.>
<I HAVE. DO YOU REMEMBER THE FOOT CLAN?>
<THE NINJA WANNABES? SHE'S ONE OF THEM?>
<SHE'S FAR MORE, CHILD. OROKU KARAI WRESTED CONTROL OF THE FOOT FROM HER FATHER AND HIS ASSOCIATES AND REFORGED THE CLAN INTO SOMETHING *TRULY REMARKABLE*... HARDLY "WANNABES.">

〈YOU!〉
〈HOW DID YOU *FIND* ME?〉
〈DON'T INSULT ME FURTHER, AMATEUR.〉
〈AN ASSASSIN WITH YOUR... *IDIOSYNCRASIES* ISN'T HARD TO TRACK DOWN.〉
〈HAYASHI TORU, I HAVE NO QUARREL WITH YOU—〉
〈—BUT I *HAVE* BEEN INSULTED, AND I WILL SEE MY HONOR RESTORED.〉
〈PLEASE, I BEG FORGIVENESS ON MY GRANDDAUGHTER'S BEHALF. NATSU INTENDED NO INSULT.〉
〈... YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS.〉
〈*SHE'S* THE ONE WHO'S TRESPASSING, AND *YOU'RE* GOING TO APOLOGIZE?〉
〈TO HELL WITH THAT!〉

<IF SHE WANTS TO SETTLE THIS, WE'LL SETTLE IT!>
<GRANDDAUGHTER, WAIT!>
<WHAT THE->
UNH!
<YOU WERE LUCKY BEFORE.>

SHK
SSHKK
GHH!
<AND NOW, YOU PAY FOR YOUR INCOMPETENCE.>
<OROKU KARAI— STOP!>
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<PLEASE, YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT. I ASK AGAIN, WITH RESPECT, THAT YOU SPARE MY GRANDDAUGHTER'S LIFE.>
<ALLOW HER A CHANCE TO ATONE.>
<AT THE VERY LEAST, HOLD OFF ON YOUR VENGEANCE FOR A MOMENT->
<-I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL ARRANGEMENT, A PARTNERSHIP, IN EXCHANGE FOR NATSU'S LIFE.>
<NO.>
<LET ME PUT IT ANOTHER WAY...>

<...I HAVE A VERY EFFICIENT SECURITY FORCE, WHICH NOW SURROUNDS YOU.>
<YOU MAY KILL NATSU, BUT YOU WILL NOT LEAVE HERE ALIVE IF YOU DO.>
<...WHAT DO YOU WANT?>
<NOW THAT YOU ASK, NOW THAT I'M TRULY THINKING ABOUT IT->
<...I WANT A LEGEND.>

ART BY SOPHIE CAMPBELL

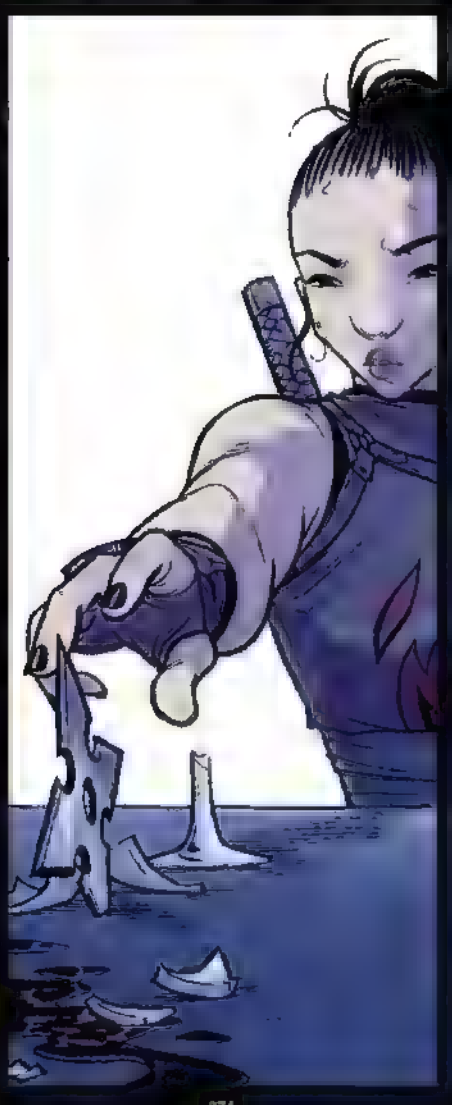
<"A LEGEND.">

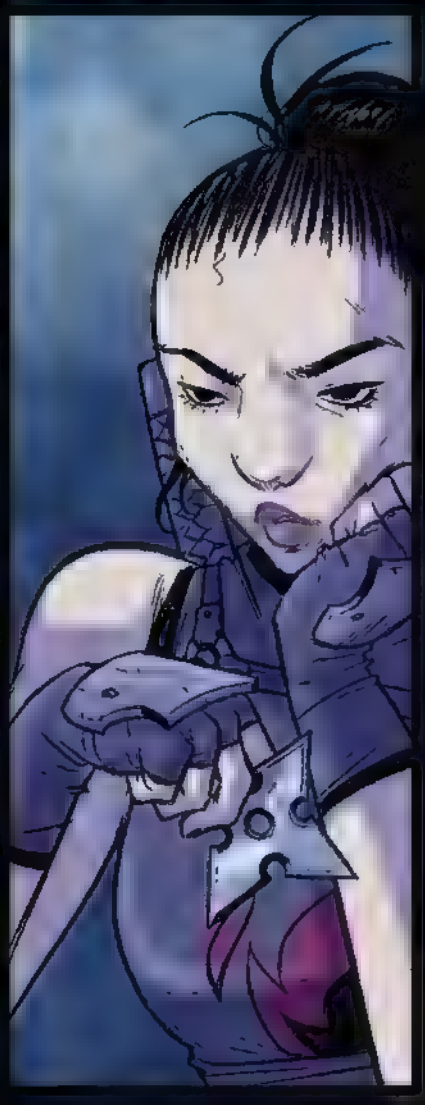
<I CAN EXPLAIN. PLEASE...>
<...COME SIT.>

<VERY WELL, THEN...>

<EXPLAIN.>

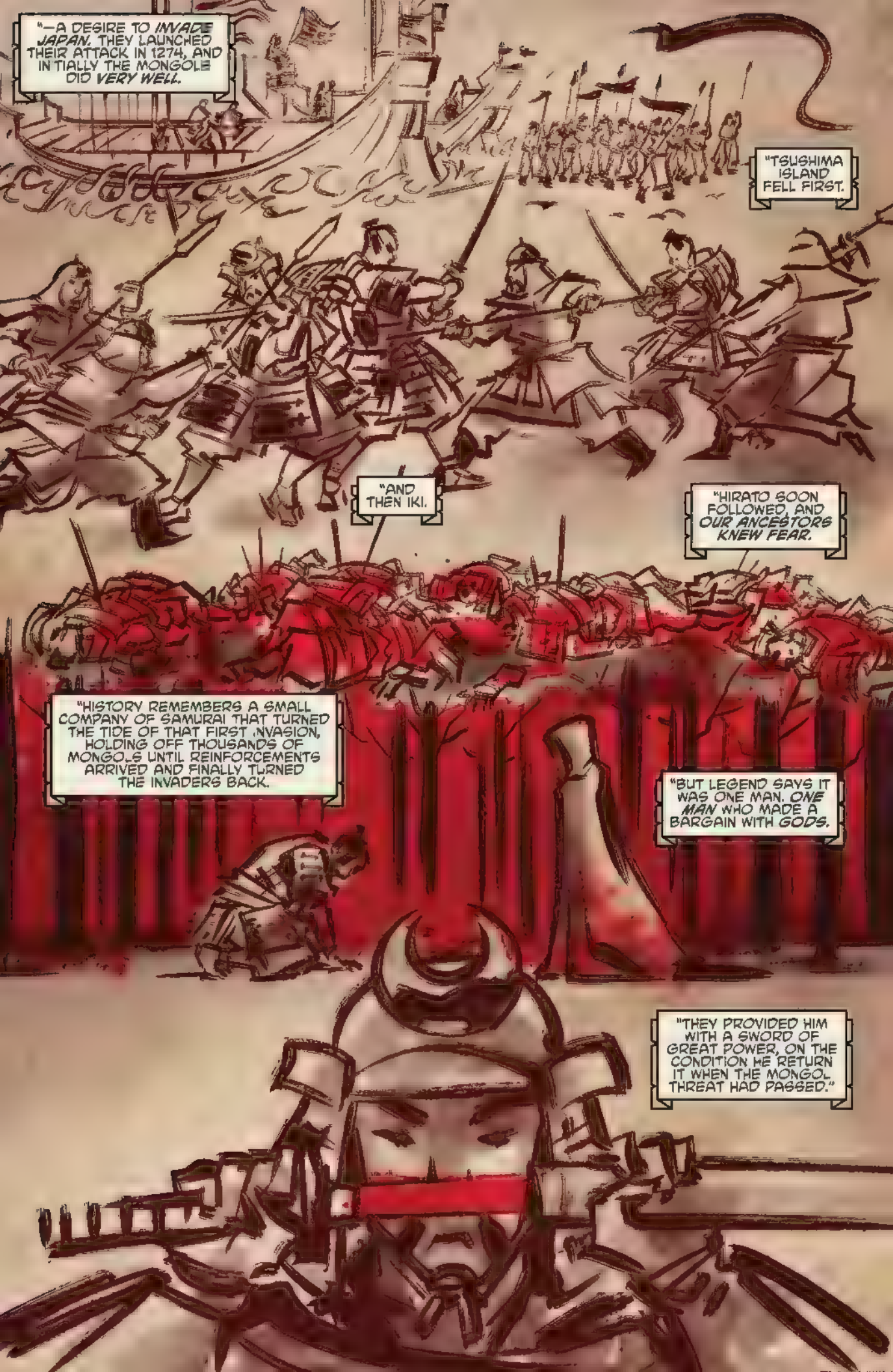
<I THANK YOU FOR YOUR INDULGENCE.>
<AND YOU *WILL* BE COMPENSATED FOR MY GRANDDAUGHTER'S REGRETTABLE ERROR... BUT NOT WITH HER *LIFE.*>





AHEM.
<YOU'VE COME TO TOKYO WHILE IT IS IN THE MIDDLE OF *A WAR*, OROKU KARAI. A *MESSY, WASTEFUL* WAR.>
<THE YAKUZA FACES A POWER VACUUM, AND, SADLY, THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT ON HOW BEST TO FILL IT.>
<BECAUSE OF THIS, THERE IS WAR. WE *WEAKEN* OURSELVES, AND COMPROMISE OUR ABILITY TO PROFIT.>
<I DON'T ENJOY WASTING RESOURCES, BUT MY CHIEF RIVAL AND HIS ALLIES ARE... THEY'RE NOT REASONABLE MEN.>
<IT WOULD BE *WRONG* TO ACCEPT THEIR LEADERSHIP *WITHOUT CHALLENGE*.>
<YOU UNDERSTAND THIS, YES? IT'S A DIFFICULT POS TION TO BE IN.>
<BUT THEN I FIND MYSELF FACE TO FACE WITH YOU--THE WOMAN WHO BROUGHT THE FOOT CLAN INTO A NEW CENTURY--AND I REALIZED, YOU MIGHT BE THE SOLUTION TO MY PROBLEM.>
<*I'M* THE "LEGEND" YOU SPOKE OF?>
<OH, I BEG YOUR PARDON. *NO*. BUT THIS LEGEND *DOES* HAVE A CONNECTION TO THE FOOT CLAN.>
<...MAY I TELL YOU A STORY?>

"THE GREAT MONGOL HORDE HAD JUST ASSUMED CONTROL OF WHAT IS NOW KOREA, SEALING THE UNION BY WEDDING A MONGOLIAN PRINCESS TO THE KING OF THOSE LANDS.
"AND FOR A BRIEF TIME, KUBLAI KHAN WAS CONTENT.
"BUT THE LUST FOR CONQUEST WAS REIGNITED, LEGEND HAS IT, BY A VISITOR—
"THE GOD OF WAR HIMSELF, *CHI YOU*.
"THEY SPOKE FOR THREE DAYS, AFTER WHICH THE GOD HAD PLANTED AN OVERWHELMING DESIRE IN THE MIND OF THE KHAN—"


"—A DESIRE TO *INVADE JAPAN.* THEY LAUNCHED THEIR ATTACK IN 1274, AND INITIALLY THE MONGOLS DID *VERY WELL.*
"TSUSHIMA ISLAND FELL FIRST.
"AND THEN IKI.
"HIRATO SOON FOLLOWED, AND *OUR ANCESTORS KNEW FEAR.*
"HISTORY REMEMBERS A SMALL COMPANY OF SAMURAI THAT TURNED THE TIDE OF THAT FIRST INVASION, HOLDING OFF THOUSANDS OF MONGOLS UNTIL REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVED AND FINALLY TURNED THE INVADERS BACK.
"BUT LEGEND SAYS IT WAS ONE MAN. *ONE MAN* WHO MADE A BARGAIN WITH *GODS.*
"THEY PROVIDED HIM WITH A SWORD OF GREAT POWER, ON THE CONDITION HE RETURN IT WHEN THE MONGOL THREAT HAD PASSED."

"BUT BOTH HISTORY AND LEGEND AGREE, AT THE BATTLE OF TOR KAI-GATA, THE MONGOLS WERE EXPELLED."
<AND THEY RETURNED SEVEN YEARS LATER, AND TYPHOONS DESTROYED THEIR SHIPS...>
<...I AM AWARE OF THE HISTORY. WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?>
<I WANT THE SWORD.>

<THE SWORD? YOU THINK I HAVE ACCESS TO A MAGICAL SWORD?>
AHAHAHA!
<NO. I'M NOT A FOOL.>
<I DON'T BELIEVE IN MAGIC.>
<...BUT MY RIVALS DO.>
<I'M MORE A LOVER OF HISTORY.>
<I BELIEVE THERE ARE TIMES WHEN LEGEND AND TRUTH COME TOGETHER, AND I BELIEVE THE SWORD FROM THE BATTLE OF TORIKAI-GATA IS JUST SUCH A TIME.>
<I ALSO BELIEVE THE SWORD WAS ACQUIRED BY THE FOOT CLAN SOMETIME DURING THE MUROMACHI PERIOD.>
<I'VE READ THAT IT WAS ACQUIRED BY TAKESHI TATSUO, WHO STORED IT ON HOKKAIDO WITH OTHER THINGS THAT HE VALUED.>
<"THE USELESS BAUBLES OF A COLLECTOR," ACCORDING TO MY GRANDFATHER.>

<AH! BUT AS THE SAYING GOES, ONE MAN'S *TRASH* IS ANOTHER MAN'S *TREASURE*. THE *VERY SIGHT* OF THAT SWORD WOULD PROVIDE ME W.TH AN EDGE IN DEALING WITH MY MORE SUPERSTITIOUS COLLEAGUES.>
<FOR SJCH AN ADVANTAGE, I WOULD PAY *ALMOST ANY PRICE*. WHAT DO YOU SAY?>
<TAKESHI TATSUO'S COLLECTION WAS WELL HIDDEN. FINDING THE SWORD MIGHT BE A *CHALLENGE*...>
<... BUT ONE I W LL CONSIDER.>
<WE'LL SPEAK AGAIN. BJT I WARN YOJ, YOU *WILL NOT* HAVE ME AT A DISADVANTAGE AGAIN.>
HEH.
<WE'LL SEE, WON'T WE?>

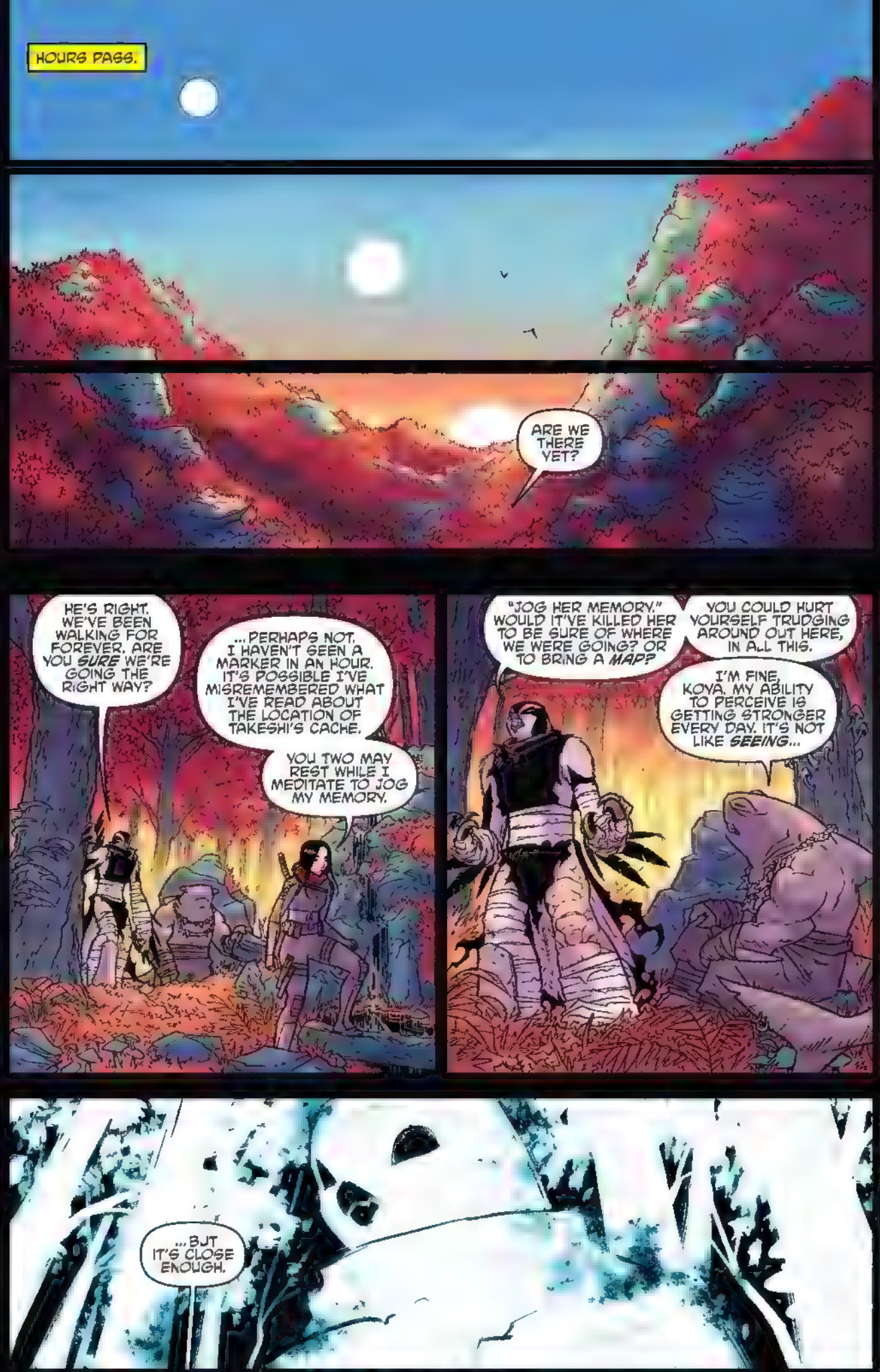
A FEW DAYS LATER...
<YOU'RE WHAT?!>
HUK
<I'VE MADE MY DECISION, AND I'VE MADE THE ARRANGEMENTS.
<BUT... BUT IT'S FORBIDDEN!>
<YES—BY THE ASHI NO HIMITSU, WHICH IS GONE. BY MY GRANDFATHER, WHO IS DEAD... AND BY THE FOOT CLAN, WHICH IS NO LONGER MY CONCERN.>
<I'M UNEXPECTEDLY CURIOUS, TOSHIRO. FINDING SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN HIDDEN AWAY FOR SO LONG...>
<...THIS IS EXACTLY THE KIND OF THING I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR.>
SHMP
OH!
<IT IS DISRESPECTFUL, KARAI. I CAN'T FOLLOW YOU ON THIS.>
<THEN DON'T.>

<APPROACHING DROP...>
THIS—NO! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!
KOYA, NO! WE HAVEN'T LANDED YET! CALM DOWN!
I DON'T CARE!
FFSSH
LET ME OUT NOW!
SHRNK

GAAAHHH! TO MAKE ME—ME!—FLY LIKE THAT... TRAPPED IN A BOX, UNABLE TO SOAR, UNABLE TO SEE THE SKY... HAVEN'T I BEEN TORTURED ENOUGH?
AAAGH! I'D RATHER BE DEAD!
THERE'S NO NEED FOR CONTINUED DRAMA. OUR LIVES HAVE ALL CHANGED RECENTLY, KOYA.
THE ONLY CORRECT RESPONSE IS TO ADAPT.
ADAPT?! HOW DO YOU HAVE TO ADAPT? ALL YOU LOST WAS YOUR GRANDFATHER!
I WAS CRIPPLED! I'LL NEVER BE WHOLE AGAIN!
...AND YOU'RE TELLING ME TO GET OVER IT?!
KOYA—!

HH.
RRRAAAGH!

KOYA—LISTEN TO ME. I DO UNDERSTAND.
YOU LOST WHAT DEFINED YOUR LIFE... BUT YOU STILL LIVE.
IT'S TIME TO FIND A NEW DEFINITION.
IF YOU CHOOSE TO DO THAT, I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO HELP.
BUT YOUR TANTRUMS ARE A LIABILITY I WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE. IF YOU WANT TO D.E. TELL ME NOW, AND I'LL MAKE IT QUICK. THAT WOULD BE BETTER, WOULDN'T IT?
NO, I.. I WANT TO LIVE, BUT..
THEN IT'S AS I SAID. I WILL HELP YOU.
BUT FIRST, LET'S ACCOMPLISH OUR GOAL.

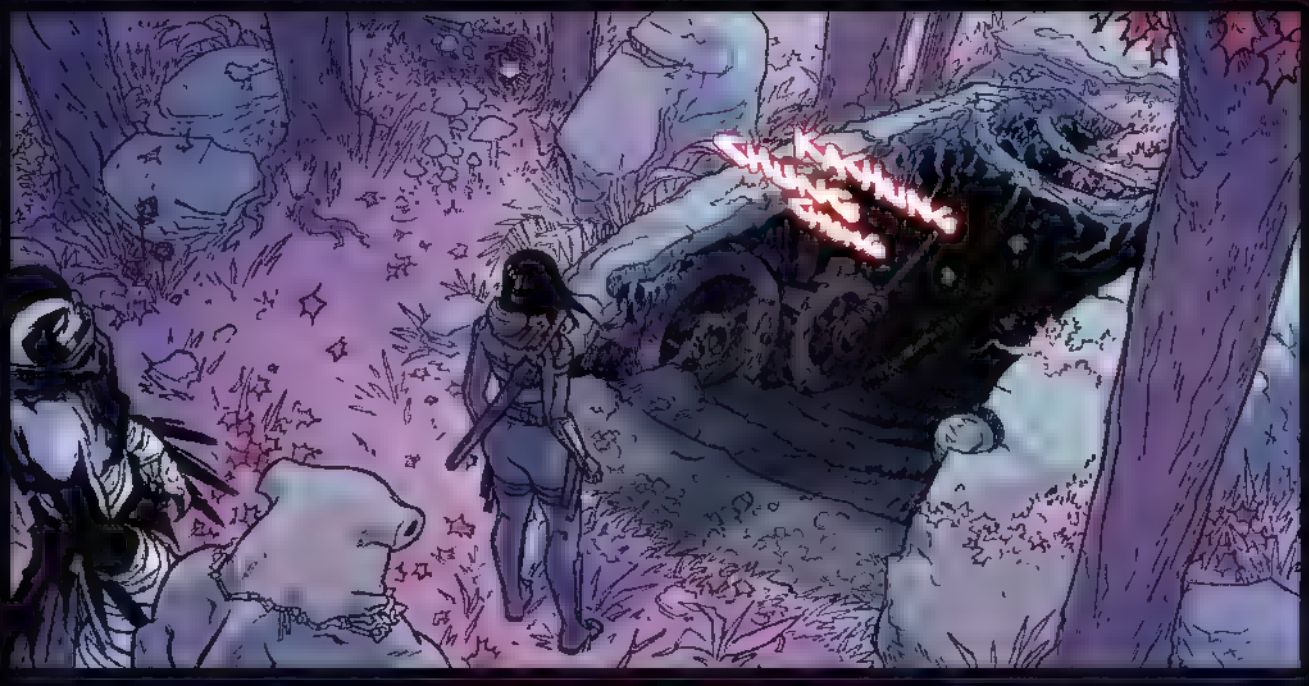

HOURS PASS.
ARE WE THERE YET?
HE'S RIGHT. WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR FOREVER. ARE YOU *SURE* WE'RE GOING THE RIGHT WAY?
...PERHAPS NOT. I HAVEN'T SEEN A MARKER IN AN HOUR. IT'S POSSIBLE I'VE MISREMEMBERED WHAT I'VE READ ABOUT THE LOCATION OF TAKESHI'S CACHE.
YOU TWO MAY REST WHILE I MEDITATE TO JOG MY MEMORY.
"JOG HER MEMORY." WOULD IT'VE KILLED HER TO BE SURE OF WHERE WE WERE GOING? OR TO BRING A *MAP*?
YOU COULD HURT YOURSELF TRUDGING AROUND OUT HERE, IN ALL THIS.
I'M FINE, KOYA. MY ABILITY TO PERCEIVE IS GETTING STRONGER EVERY DAY. IT'S NOT LIKE *SEEING*...
...BUT IT'S CLOSE ENOUGH.

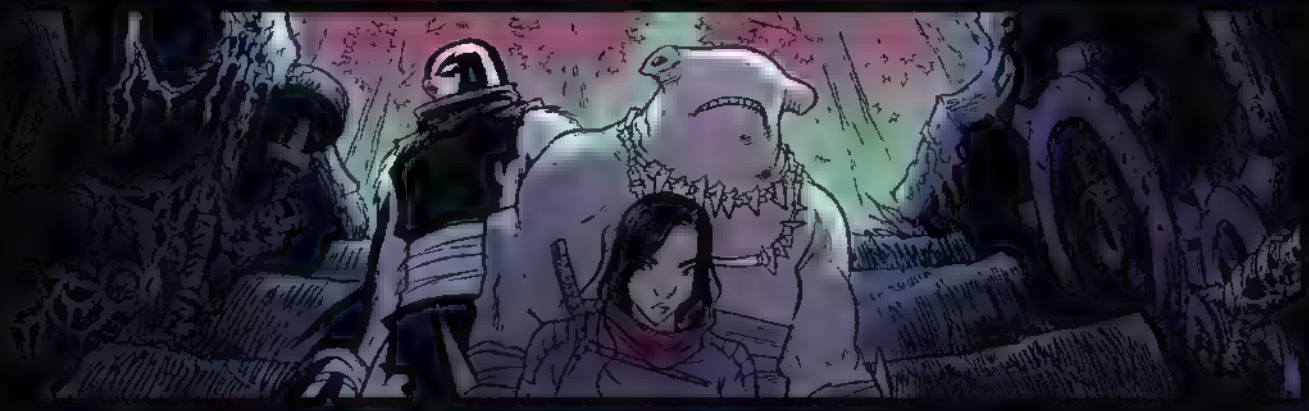
WELL, MAYBE YOU SHOULD USE YOUR MAGIC RADAR TO FIND WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR.
...BECAUSE I'M STARTING TO THINK WE WON'T FIND IT OTHERWISE.
YOUR COMPANION IS RIGHT.
YOU WON'T FIND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.
GRANDFATHER--?

NO. MERELY A FELLOW TRAVELER.
DID I MEDITATE TOO DEEPLY? AM I ASLEEP?
YOU KNOW TOO WELL, OROKU KARAI, HOW EASILY GODS AND DEMONS CAN VISIT THE MINDS OF MORTALS, ASLEEP OR AWAKE.
...OR GHOSTS.
YES. OR GHOSTS.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR.
A RELIC OF THE FOOT CLAN.
IT IS FAR MORE THAN *THAT*, GIRL. IT IS *EXACTLY* WHAT THE LEGENDS SAY.
AND IT HAS *DESTROYED ALL WHO HAVE WIELDED IT.* IS THAT A BURDEN YOU SEEK FOR YOURSELF?
I WAS ASKED TO FIND IT BY ANOTHER.

PEOPLE LIKE YOU DON'T SEEK THINGS LIKE THIS FOR *OTHERS*, ITEMS OF STATUS, ITEMS OF POWER, ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE. *NO*. YOU'RE DOING THIS FOR *YOURSELF*.
SPEAK THE TRUTH.
I WAS ASKED TO FIND THE SWORD, AND THAT IS THE TRUTH.
BUT THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THE MORE IT FELT LIKE SOMETHING I HAD TO DO, YES. WILL YOU HELP SHOW ME THE WAY?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE ASKING? DO YOU KNOW THE DANGERS AHEAD?
THEY DON'T MATTER. I WILL MEET THE CHALLENGE OR I WON'T. NOW, AGAIN, WITH RESPECT— *HELP ME*, OR LET ME *GO ON MY WAY*.
THAT SWORD IS *CURSED*, OROKU KARA, AND IT MAY *BREAK YOU*. BUT YOU ASKED FOR MY HELP WITH RESPECT...
... AND SO, I WILL *GIVE IT*.
THOOK

KOYA. BLUDGEON. YOUR BREAK IS OVER.
BECAUSE NOW I KNOW EXACTLY WHERE TO GO.
THERE.
KLIK
RRRUMMMBLE
WE'RE FINALLY WHERE WE NEED TO BE. LET'S GO.


KACHUNK
SHUCK
CHUNK



RUMMBLE
BE CAREFUL, BLUDGEON. THE GROUND IS UNEVEN.
THE DOOR!
IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE'RE NOT TURNING BACK.
...WHOOPS...
KACHUNK

BLUDGEON! WHY DIDN'T YOU WATCH WHERE YOU WERE GOING WITH YOUR STUPID ESP?
I COULDN'T GET MY BEARINGS RIGHT AWAY, AND—
CHRRF
...KOYA!
I SENSE SOMETHING!
WE'RE NOT ALONE DOWN HERE!

BECKY CLONAN

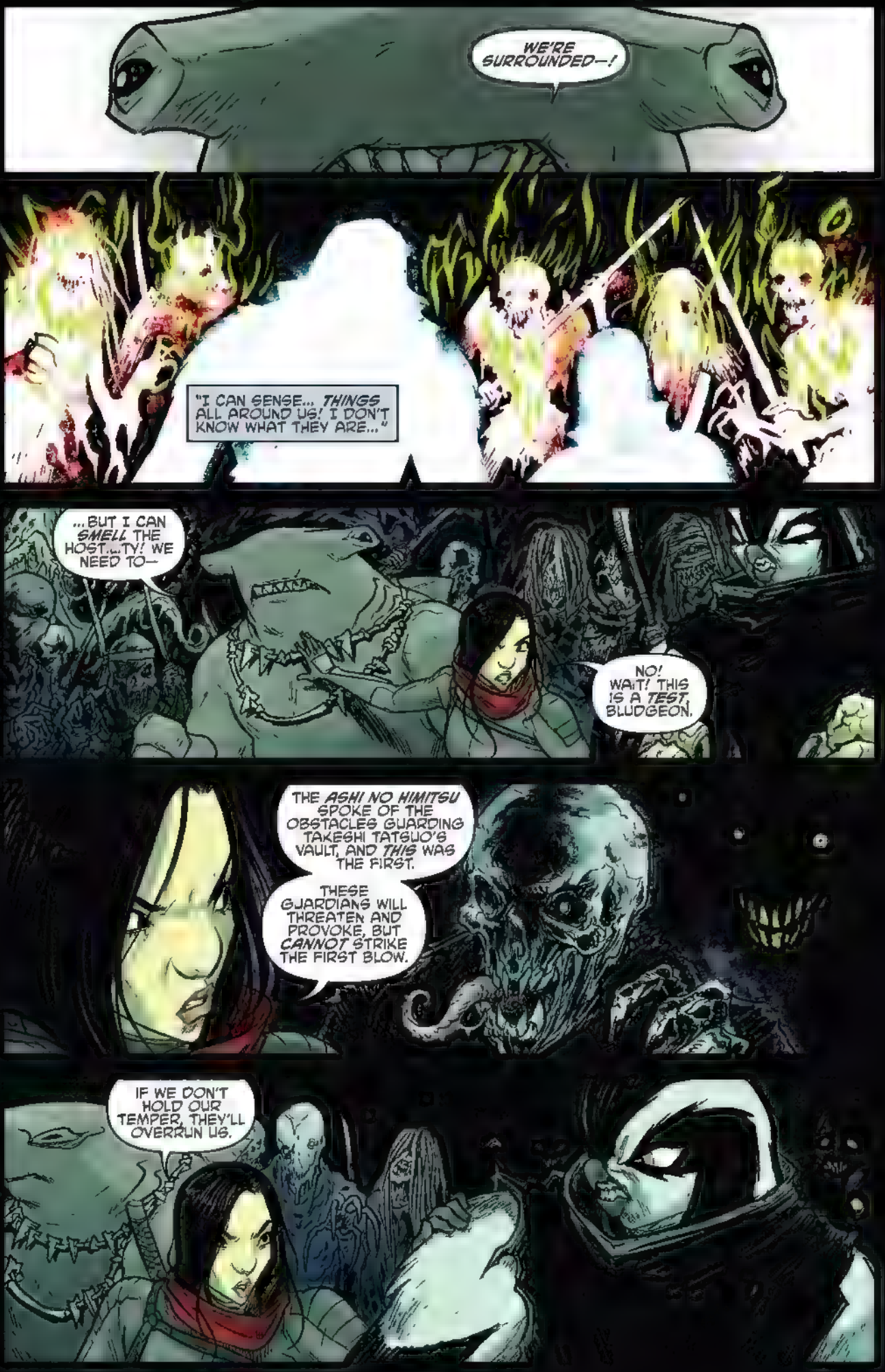
UNIVERSE #14
"KARMA'S PATH"

art by FREDDIE E. WILLIAMS II

THE OFFICE OF HAYASHI TORU.
<SPEAK.>
<THEY'VE MADE THEIR WAY INTO SOME CAVES, SIR. DO YOU WANT US TO FOLLOW?>
<—NO.>
<THERE ARE SURELY TRAPS. LET KARAI AND HER FREAKS DEAL WITH THEM... BUT YOU'RE FREE TO KILL THEM IF OR WHEN THEY EMERGE.>
<AND KEEP ME INFORMED.>
<GRANDFATHER—?!>

〈DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT? YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE KARAI AMBUSHED? WHY?〉
〈NATSU, HAVEN'T I TOLD YOU THAT EAVESDROPPING IS IMPOLITE? I'D THINK YOU'D BE PLEASED... SINCE I DON'T BELIEVE FOR ONE SECOND I CONVINCED HER TO SPARE YOUR LIFE.〉
〈WE WOULD'VE WORKED THAT OUT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. I'M NOT AFRAID OF HER.〉
〈ANY REASONABLE PERSON WOULD BE.〉
〈BUT OROKU KARAI GAVE ME AN ULTIMATUM. IN MY OWN HOME, IN FRONT OF SUBORDINATES! IN FRONT OF FAMILY!〉
〈I WILL NOT ALLOW THAT TO STAND.〉
〈GRANDFATHER, AFTER ALL YOUR TALK OF AVOIDING WASTE, THIS MAKES NO SENSE. SHE'S DOING WHAT YOU ASKED. I--THIS ISN'T HONORABLE.〉
〈HONOR? HONOR! NATSU, YOU SOUND LIKE YOUR FATHER.〉
〈HIS FOOLISH SENSE OF "HONOR" RESULTED IN HIS DEATH... AND MY DAUGHTER'S.〉
〈IT'S A CONCEPT I CAN NO LONGER PLACE ANY FAITH IN.〉
〈...BUT YOU TOLD ME HONOR WAS IMPORTANT.〉

〈...I ALSO TOLD YOU FAIRY TALES. I'D ASSUMED YOU'D GROWN OUT OF SUCH THINGS.〉
〈NATSU, KARAI IS DANGEROUS, BUT SHE'S ALSO A DREAMER. WHO ELSE WOULD CLING SO TIGHTLY TO ANCIENT WAYS?〉
〈THE IDEA OF QUESTING FOR A HIDDEN TREASURE DISTRACTED HER, AND THAT DISTRACTION SAVED YOUR LIFE. KILLING HER WILL ENSURE THAT SAFETY.〉
〈BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SWORD?〉
〈IF IT EXISTS, IF SHE FINDS IT, MY MEN WILL BRING IT TO ME. IF NOT... IT DOESN'T MATTER.〉
〈SO, YOU JUST LIED ABOUT EVERYTHING AND PLAN TO STAB HER IN THE BACK?〉
〈MIND YOUR TONE. I KNOW WHAT'S BEST.〉
〈I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THAT ANYMORE.〉
〈NATSU, I WON'T TOLERATE THIS ATTITUDE FROM YOU.〉
〈I'M WARNING YOU, IF YOU WALK OUT THAT DOOR BEFORE I ALLOW IT, YOU WILL NOT BE WELCOME BACK.〉
...


WE'RE SURROUNDED—!
"I CAN SENSE... THINGS ALL AROUND US! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE..."
...BUT I CAN SMELL THE HOST...TY! WE NEED TO—
NO! WAIT! THIS IS A TEST, BLUDGEON.
THE ASHI NO HIMITSU SPOKE OF THE OBSTACLES GUARDING TAKESHI TATSUO'S VAULT, AND THIS WAS THE FIRST.
THESE GUARDIANS WILL THREATEN AND PROVOKE, BUT CANNOT STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW.
IF WE DON'T HOLD OUR TEMPER, THEY'LL OVERRUN US.

YES, LITTLE GIRL. HOLD YOUR TEMPER, IF YOU CAN.
BUT THE DEAD ARE PATIENT. AND THE DEAD ARE WISE.
WISE ENOUGH TO KNOW YOU'LL FAIL.
YOU'VE ONLY EVER SUCCEEDED TO SET UP A LARGER FAILURE. YOU FAILED YOUR GRANDFATHER...
...BUT YOUR BIGGEST FAILURE WAS THE FOOT CLAN. YOU BROUGHT IT BACK, AND IT WAS TAKEN AWAY. A PIECE OF YOU IS GONE WITH IT, AND YOU FEEL ALONE, EMPTY.
BUT IF YOU JOIN US YOU'LL NEVER BE ALONE AGAIN.
AND YOU. YOUR EYES ARE GONE. WHAT KIND OF USE WILL YOU EVER BE?
UNLESS YOU ARE SLAUGHTERED FOR SOUP.
YOU WOULD MAKE A LOT OF SOUP.
EVERY PREDATOR KNOWS THEY MIGHT ALSO BE PREY.
YOU'LL NEVER SEE THE END COMING! YOU'LL NEVER HAVE A FIGHTING CHANCE! YOU'RE BLIND!
WHICH MAKES IT THAT MUCH EASIER TO IGNORE YOU.

MAYBE THE BLIND ONE CAN IGNORE US, BUT YOUR EYES ARE TOO GOOD. YOU CAN SEE EVERYTHING.
YOU SAW YOUR PERFECT WINGS RIPPED FROM YOU.
YOU COULD ONLY WATCH WHILE THE THING THAT MADE YOU BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE WAS TAKEN AWAY...
BY
A
TURTLE.
LEAVE ME ALONE...!

MEANWHILE, BACK IN TOKYO...
WWHHHHSSSTHUK
WOO!
<WHAT A RUSH!>
<I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE—>

<—BUT YOU'VE COME TO THE WRONG PLACE.>
AI!
<WAIT! IVE COME ABOUT KARAI! MY NAME IS NATSU, AND—>
<SHE'S GONE.>
<I KNOW! SHE'S UP NORTH, LOOKING FOR A SWORD, AND SHE'S WALKING INTO A TRAP!>
<LOOK, THERE'S NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN ME AND HER— BUT SHE CAUGHT A STRAY BULLET, AND IT WAS MY FAULT.>
<I FIGURE I AT LEAST OWE HER A WARNING FOR THE TROUBLE.>
<HOW DID YOU FIND THIS PLACE?>
<I LOOKED IT UP ONLINE, COME ON.>
<HH. WHAT KIND OF TRAP?>
<IF I KNOW MY GRANDFATHER, IT'S PROBABLY A BUNCH OF GUYS WITH A LOT OF BIG GUNS WAITING TO MOW HER DOWN.>
<SHE'D NEVER SEE IT COMING.>

...
<I BELIEVE YOU.>
<YEAH, WELL, GREAT. TELL HER GOOD LUCK, AND THEN TELL ME WHERE THE ELEVATOR IS.>
<YOU CAN TELL HER YOURSELF. YOU'RE COMING WITH ME.>
<I'M SORRY?>
<I WANT TO BE IMPRESSED BY YOUR HONORABLE INTENTIONS, BUT FIRST I NEED TO BE SURE I CAN TRUST THEM.>
<COME— I'LL MAKE THE NECESSARY TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS. WE CAN BE WHERE WE NEED TO BE IN A FEW HOURS.>
<AND WHILE WE TRAVEL, PERHAPS YOU CAN TELL ME WHY YOUR GRANDFATHER PUT THE IDEA OF THIS SWORD IN KARAI'S HEAD TO BEGIN WITH, YES?>

YOU KNOW YOU'LL NEVER LEAVE THIS CAVE ALIVE!
YOU'LL BE TRAPPED UNDERGROUND, FOREVER! YOU'LL NEVER SEE THE SKY AGAIN, LET ALONE SOAR THROUGH IT!
MAKES YOU WANT TO LASH OUT, DOESN'T IT?

TAKE A DEEP BREATH, KOYA.
REMEMBER WHAT KARAI SAID—IF WE DON'T ATTACK *THEM*, THEY CAN'T ATTACK *US*. YOU'RE DOING FINE.

BLUDGEON. OUR PATH IS BLOCKED. CAN YOU MOVE THIS?

I CAN TRY.

JUST... NEED TO PUSH...
HNNNNGHH...
YOU'RE DOING IT!
LOOK AT THAT. EVEN BLIND, HE'S STILL USEFUL.
DON'T YOU WISH YOU WERE?
SHUK
SHUT UP!
...OH NO.
YES. AT LAST.
KOYA— BLIDGEON HAS OPENED THE WAY. GET IN THE CAVE! NOW!

SHE STRUCK FIRST. SHE IS OURS.
SHE MAY HAVE, BUT I DIDN'T. AND YOU'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME TO GET TO KOYA.
WE ACCEPT YOUR OFFER.
NO!
SHHRKKH
HNNNH—

...
BLUDGEON! THAT WAS INCREDIBLE—YOU SAVED US!
...YOU'RE WELCOME.
I THINK I'LL JUST SIT FOR A MOMENT..
WAIT. THOSE THINGS CAN'T MOVE THAT ROCK, CAN THEY?
"THOSE THINGS" NO LONGER MATTER. THIS IS A NEW CHAMBER. THERE WILL BE A NEW OBSTACLE.
—LOOK.
"IT EXISTS."
WE'VE FOUND IT!
WAIT! THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE HERE, TOO... MOVING FAST...
WHERE?

〈YOU ARE NOT MY MASTER. WHO ARE YOU?〉
〈I AM OROKU KARAI, BLOOD OF OROKU SAKI, THE GREATEST LEADER OF THE FOOT CLAN...〉
〈...AND I HAVE COME TO TAKE POSSESSION OF *THE SWORD*.〉
〈WHO ARE *YOU*, GUARDIAN?〉

<I AM OCHO. I WAS TRAPPED IN THIS FORM BY THE WITCH KITSUNE DURING THE ERA THAT BEARS MY NAME, AND I AM BOUND IN SERVICE TO THE FOOT CLAN... AT LEAST, UNTIL THE SWORD IS RETURNED TO THE GODS.>
<HAVE YOU COME TO DO SO?>
<I'M HERE TO CLAIM THE SWORD, YES.>
<BUT NOT TO RETURN IT.>
<YOU ARE NOT MY MASTER, OROKU KARAI. SO YOU MAY ONLY TAKE THE SWORD—>

SWASH
<—IF YOU CAN GET PAST ME!>
KARAI! WE'LL—
KOYA— NO! I HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE!
WHY DO THEY ALWAYS HAVE TO SAY THINGS LIKE THAT?
I THINK SHE JUST LIKES TO SHOW OFF.
UNH!
I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND PEOPLE.
HH.

KIYAI!
TING
KINK

SHINK
SWIP
BHFF
BOOM

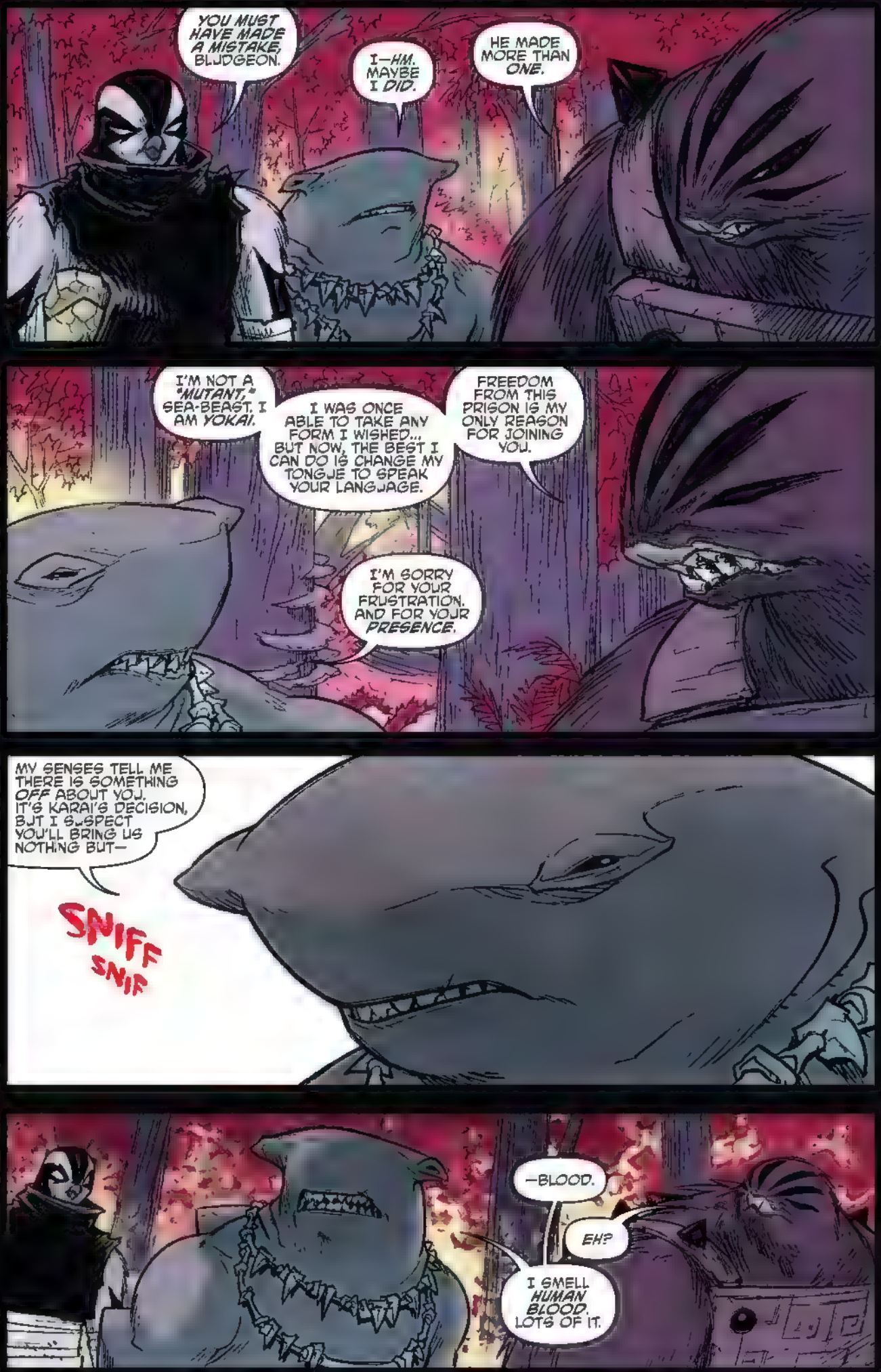
TAP
KRAK
BLUDGEON!
—I NEED YOUR HELP AFTER ALL!
WHAT ARE WE DOING? I'LL PECK OUT HER EYES!
NO. BLUDGEON...
...THROW ME.
WHISSH

NO!
YES.

ART BY SOPHIE CAMPBELL

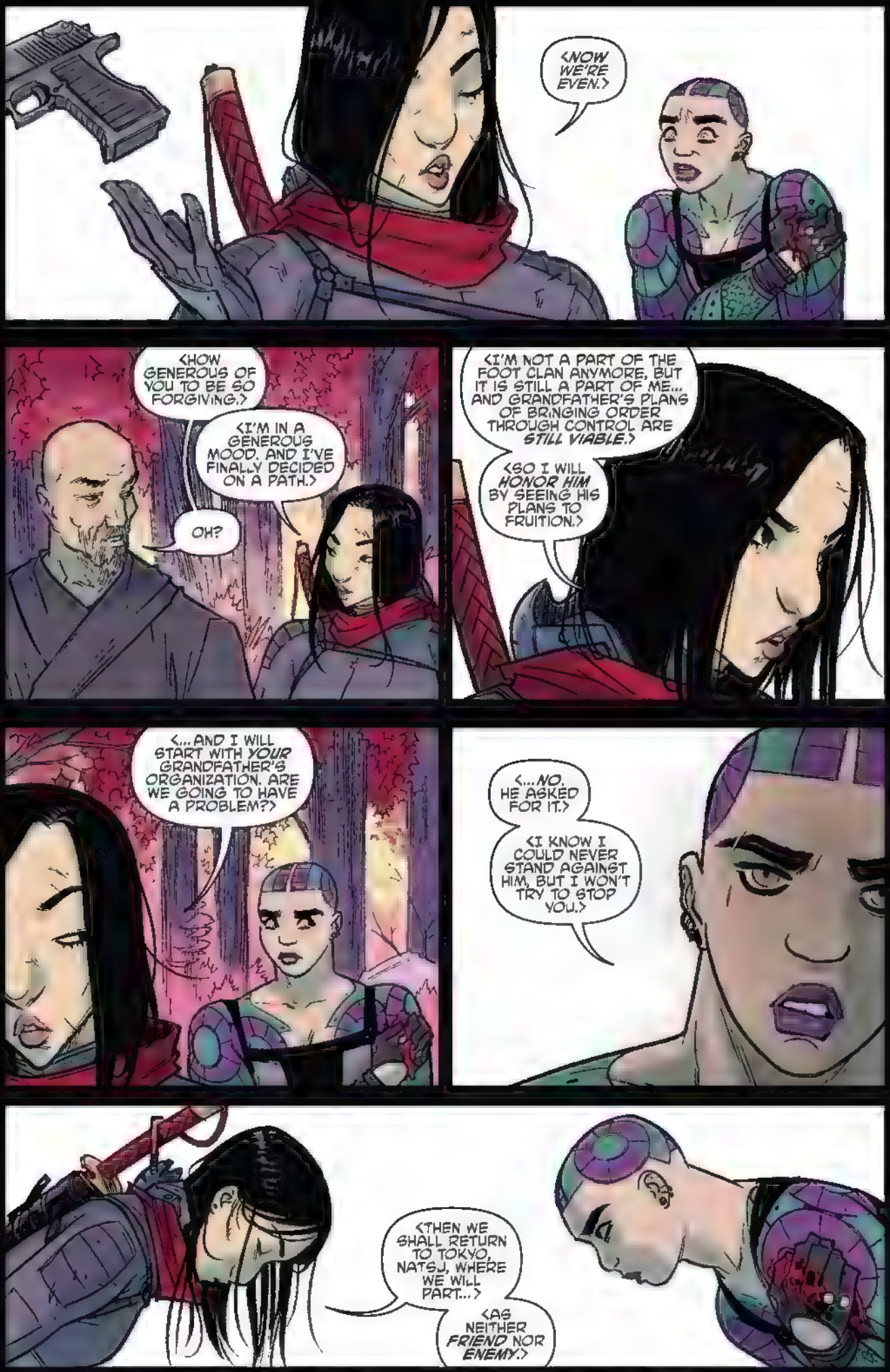
HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO THE *KIRA NO KEN*—A WEAPON BLESSED BY THE GODS—WAS LENT TO MANKIND.
WHEN THE GODS DEMANDED ITS RETURN, MEN REFUSED, AND SO ITS BLESSINGS WERE TWISTED INTO A CURSE.
THE SWORD WAS EVENTUALLY SECRETED AWAY BY THE FOUNDER OF THE FOOT CLAN, AND THE MEMORY OF IT FADED, BECOMING JUST ANOTHER STORY.
<DO YOU SUBMIT, GUARDIAN?>
UNTIL NOW.
<I ADMIT MY FAILURE. I ACCEPT MY END.>
<YOUR END? *NO*.>
<I CAN STILL MAKE *USE* OF YOU.>

<YOU WILL PROMISE ME YOUR LOYALTY AND SHOW US THE WAY OUT OF THIS CAVE.>
<IF YOU SERVE ME WELL, I'LL FIND A WAY TO FREE YOU FROM THIS FORM YOU HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN.>
<DO WE HAVE AN AGREEMENT?>
...
KOOM
IT'S ALREADY MORNING? WE WERE DOWN THERE THAT LONG?!
AT LEAST WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW FOR OUR TROUBLE.
A MAGIC SWORD, ANOTHER MUTANT... AND THAT SMALL CARVING YOU TOOK, KOYA. IS THAT... IS IT SHAPED LIKE A BIRD?
HOW DID—I MEAN, *BE QUIET*, IT WAS JUST A—


YOU MUST HAVE MADE A MISTAKE, BLUDGEON.
I—HM. MAYBE I DID.
HE MADE MORE THAN ONE.
I'M NOT A "MUTANT," SEA-BEAST. I AM YOKAI.
I WAS ONCE ABLE TO TAKE ANY FORM I WISHED... BUT NOW, THE BEST I CAN DO IS CHANGE MY TONGUE TO SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE.
FREEDOM FROM THIS PRISON IS MY ONLY REASON FOR JOINING YOU.
I'M SORRY FOR YOUR FRUSTRATION. AND FOR YOUR PRESENCE.
MY SENSES TELL ME THERE IS SOMETHING OFF ABOUT YOU. IT'S KARAI'S DECISION, BUT I SUSPECT YOU'LL BRING US NOTHING BUT—
SNIFF
SNIF
—BLOOD.
EH?
I SMELL HUMAN BLOOD. LOTS OF IT.

—THIS WAY!
<THESE MEN—WHAT HAPPENED HERE?>
<CLEARLY IT WAS FATE, KARAI—>
<—FORCING ME TO FOLLOW YOU NORTH AFTER ALL.>
TOSHIRO?
<...WHAT IS *SHE* DOING WITH YOU?>
<THESE MEN INTENDED TO AMBUSH YOU, KARAI.>
<IF NOT FOR THIS YOUNG WOMAN'S INTERVENTION, YOU MIGHT BE DEAD.>
<YEAH. *UH*... WELL... LIKE I TOLD HIM, I *OWED* YOU.>

<MY GRANDFATHER DIDN'T CARE ABOUT A *SWORD*.>
<HE FIGURED YOU WERE TOO MUCH OF A THREAT TO LET LIVE AND DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES ABOUT IT.>
<HE TALKED YOU INTO LEAVING AND HAD YOU WATCHED, WAITING TO MAKE A MOVE.>
<LOOK, IT JUST WASN'T HONORABLE, AND THAT CONCEPT STILL HAS *SOME* MEANING FOR ME... SO I FIGURE THIS MAKES US EVEN, RIGHT?>
BLAM
<NOT QUITE.>


<NOW WE'RE EVEN.>
<HOW GENEROUS OF YOU TO BE SO FORGIVING.>
<I'M IN A GENEROUS MOOD. AND I'VE FINALLY DECIDED ON A PATH.>
OH?
<I'M NOT A PART OF THE FOOT CLAN ANYMORE, BUT IT IS STILL A PART OF ME... AND GRANDFATHER'S PLANS OF BRINGING ORDER THROUGH CONTROL ARE STILL VIABLE.>
<SO I WILL HONOR HIM BY SEEING HIS PLANS TO FRUITION.>
<...AND I WILL START WITH YOUR GRANDFATHER'S ORGANIZATION. ARE WE GOING TO HAVE A PROBLEM?>
<...NO. HE ASKED FOR IT.>
<I KNOW I COULD NEVER STAND AGAINST HIM, BUT I WON'T TRY TO STOP YOU.>
<THEN WE SHALL RETURN TO TOKYO, NATSU, WHERE WE WILL PART...>
<AS NEITHER FRIEND NOR ENEMY.>

TOKYO. THAT EVENING.
<IS IT DONE?>
<NO, HAYASHI TORU, IT IS NOT. AND NOW—>
<—I'M COMING FOR YOU.>
<NO—!>

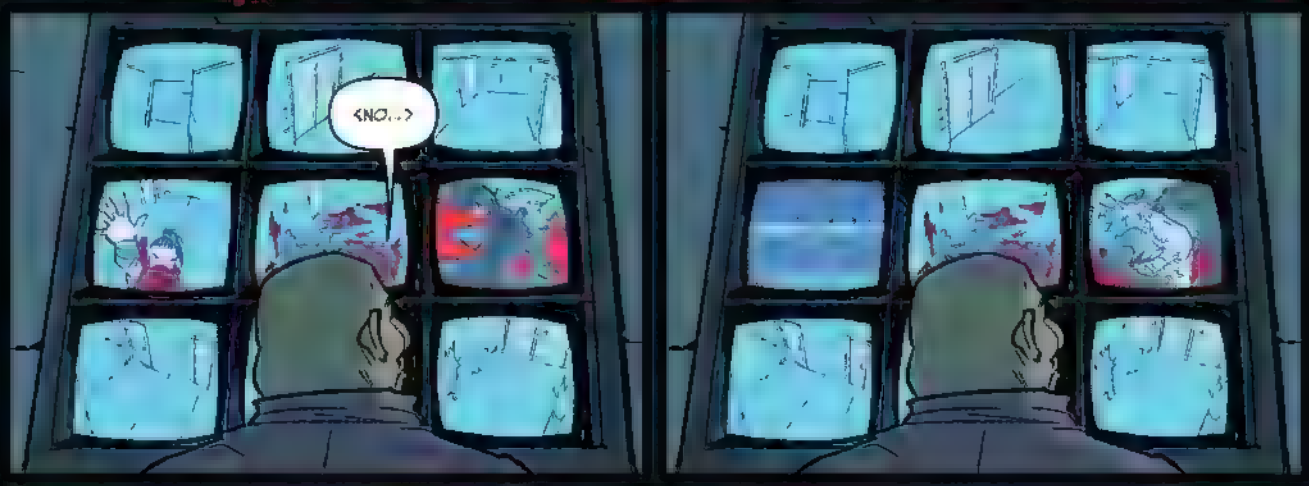
〈HAH. YOU SHOULD SEE HOW HE RUNS, TOSHIRO.〉
〈I'M SURE IT'S VERY ENTERTAINING–〉
〈–BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE TAKEN HIM OUT WITH A WELL-PLACED ARROW.〉
〈NO, OLD FRIEND. HE DESERVES THE ANTICIPATION OF DEATH.〉
〈I ALMOST PITY HIM.〉
〈AND YES, BEFORE YOU ASK, YOUR REINFORCEMENTS ARE ON THE WAY.〉
〈IN A SURPRISING TURN ALL THE ACCESS CODES NATSU PROVIDED HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE LEGITIMATE.〉
〈PERHAPS IT WAS GOOD I DECIDED NOT TO KILL HER.〉

=PANT=
=PANT=
=PANT=
<COME ON... FASTER.>
beep boop
SHHFF
<AT LAST!>
=PANT=
=PANT=
<THERE. RELAX.>
<THERE IS ENOUGH SECURITY TO HOLD OFF AN ARMY, AND ACCESSING THIS ROOM JUST PUT THEM ALL ON HIGH ALERT.>
<NO ONE CAN STAND AGAINST SUCH ODDS...>
325

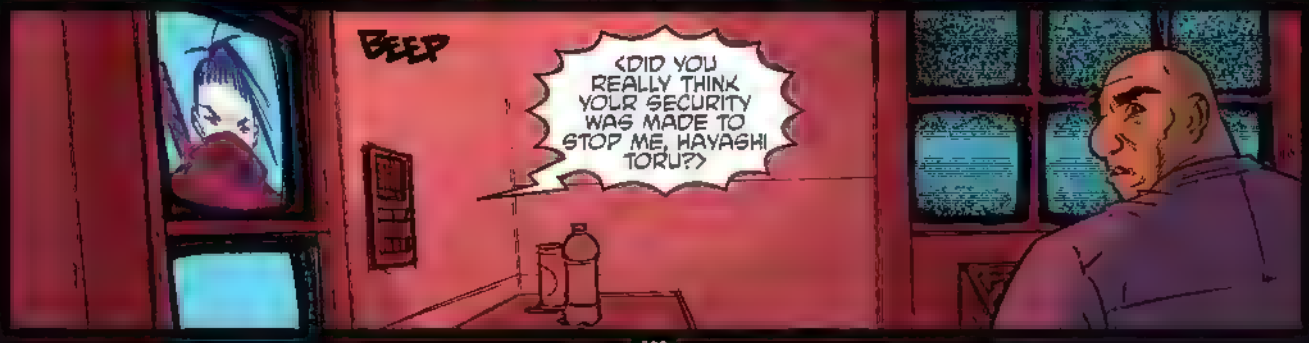
<"—I AM SAFE."?
HELLO, PREY.

I CAN HEAR YOUR HEARTBEAT, KOYA. IT'S SO STEADY.
I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME YOU WERE SO CALM. I'M HAPPY FOR YOU.
THERE'S A TRICK TO IT, BLUDGEON—
—I JUST FOCUS ON GETTING WHAT I WANT, AND IT MAKES ME HAPPY.
DON'T TALK. KILL!

KILL
EVERYTHING


<NO...>

<WHAT?! THIS IS—>


BEEP
<DID YOU REALLY THINK YOUR SECURITY WAS MADE TO STOP ME, HAYASHI TORU?>

<I'M INSULTED. I AM NO ORDINARY THREAT.>
<YOU ARE NO THREAT! YOU ARE NO THREAT AT ALL!>
<DON'T SAY THINGS WE BOTH KNOW AREN'T TRUE.>
<"YOUR TECHNOLOGICAL DEFENSES HAVE BEEN D'SABLED.>
<"YOUR MEN HAVE LIKEWISE BEEN DEALT W TH."
<THIS IS OVER, HAYASHI TORU, AND I HAVE WON.>
<YOUR TERRITOR ES. YOUR ASSETS. YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD. THEY ARE NOW MINE.>

<THEY— YOU—NO! I WILL NEVER ALLOW THIS!>
<THE ONLY CHOICE YOU HAVE LEFT IS WHETHER YOU COME OUT AND DIE WITH HONOR, OR FORCE ME TO COME IN AFTER YOU.>
<COME IN AFTER— HA!>
<THIS ROOM IS STATE OF THE ART, GIRL. AIRTIGHT. BOMBPROOF.>
<ENOUGH SUPPLIES TO LAST FOR MONTHS—AND CLOSED SYSTEM COMMUNICATION TO CONTACT MORE MEN...>
<...MEN WHO WILL COME PREPARED FOR YOU AND YOUR FREAKS.>
<YOU ONCE OFFERED TO TELL ME A STORY. NOW I HAVE ONE FOR YOU.>
<ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A WARRIOR WHO HAD LOST HER WAY IN THE WORLD. SHE MET A NOBLEMAN WHO SUGGESTED A QUEST FOR A MAGIC SWORD.>
<THE QUEST WAS A RUSE, FOR THE NOBLEMAN FEARED THE WARRIOR.>
<HE DIDN'T BELIEVE THE SWORD HE'D SENT HER FOR EXISTED, AND WAS MERELY LOOKING TO HAVE THE WARRIOR KILLED.>
<HE DIDN'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO FACE HER HIMSELF.>
<THE WARRIOR SOON DISCOVERED TWO THINGS: FIRST, THAT THE SWORD WAS VERY REAL...>

SWISH
SWISH
SWISH
<—AND SECOND, THE NOBLEMAN'S TREACHERY.>
<TELL ME. HOW WOULD THE YAKUZA DEAL WITH SUCH A THING?>
KWHAM

<I'LL SHOW YOU!>
BLAM BLAM
TWING
KTWINGG
<I DOUBT THAT.>
<YOU WOULD NOT BE A MATCH FOR ME IN YOUR PRIME.>
FWIP
SHLIK
NyARRGGH!

〈DID YOU LEARN NOTHING? YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER TRIED THAT AGAINST ME.〉
〈IT DIDN'T WORK FOR HER. WHY WOULD IT WORK FOR YOU?〉
KIYAAA!!
SLASH
NNGHH!
〈THAT SWORD—IT IS CURSED... USING IT WILL COST YOU YOUR SOUL!〉
〈MY SOUL IS SECURE, OLD MAN—AND THIS TIME, NO STORIES WILL STAY MY HAND.〉
SHIK

DNS
<ARE YOU FINISHED NOW?>
<I'M FINISHED HERE.>
<I'VE SEEN TO TORU, AND I'VE COLLECTED ALL I NEED TO ASSUME CONTROL OF HIS BUSINESSES.>
<YOUR GRANDFATHER WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD.>
<AND I'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN...>
A FEW WEEKS LATER.
GENTLEMEN, I THANK YOU ALL FOR JOINING ME.

<WE KNOW YOUR REPUTATION, OROKU KARAI, OR WE WOULDN'T BE HERE.>
<YES. WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?>
<ULTIMATELY? I WANT ORDER, GENTLEMEN. AND I'VE DECIDED TO START WITH YOU.>
<YOU'RE AT WAR WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE YOU CAN'T AGREE ON HOW TO BEST FILL A POWER VACUUM.>
<MY SOLUTION: GOING FORWARD, I'LL BE IN CHARGE. AGREE AND PROFIT. DECLINE AND YOU'LL BE REMOVED.>
<I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT WE WILL ALL DECLINE.>
<AGREED. AND IF YOU THINK TO PIT YOUR FORCES AGAINST ALL OF OURS, GIRL—WITH RESPECT—YOU'LL LOSE.>
<WITH RESPECT, I DOUBT THAT VERY MUCH.>
<BUT I DON'T INTEND TO FIGHT A WAR JUST YET.>

<FIRST, I'M GOING TO SEND A MESSAGE— TO YOUR LIEUTENANTS.>
<MAYBE THEY SHOULD'VE SAID YES.>
<CLEARLY.>
<THERE. I BELIEVE THAT MESSAGE WILL BE UNDERSTOOD.>
<I WILL ESTABLISH A NEW CLAN OF MY OWN AND BRING ORDER TO TOKYO. AND THEN, WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT...>
<... I WILL RETURN TO NEW YORK.>
THE END.

SOPHIE CAMPBELL

UNIVERSE #12-15
"PREY"

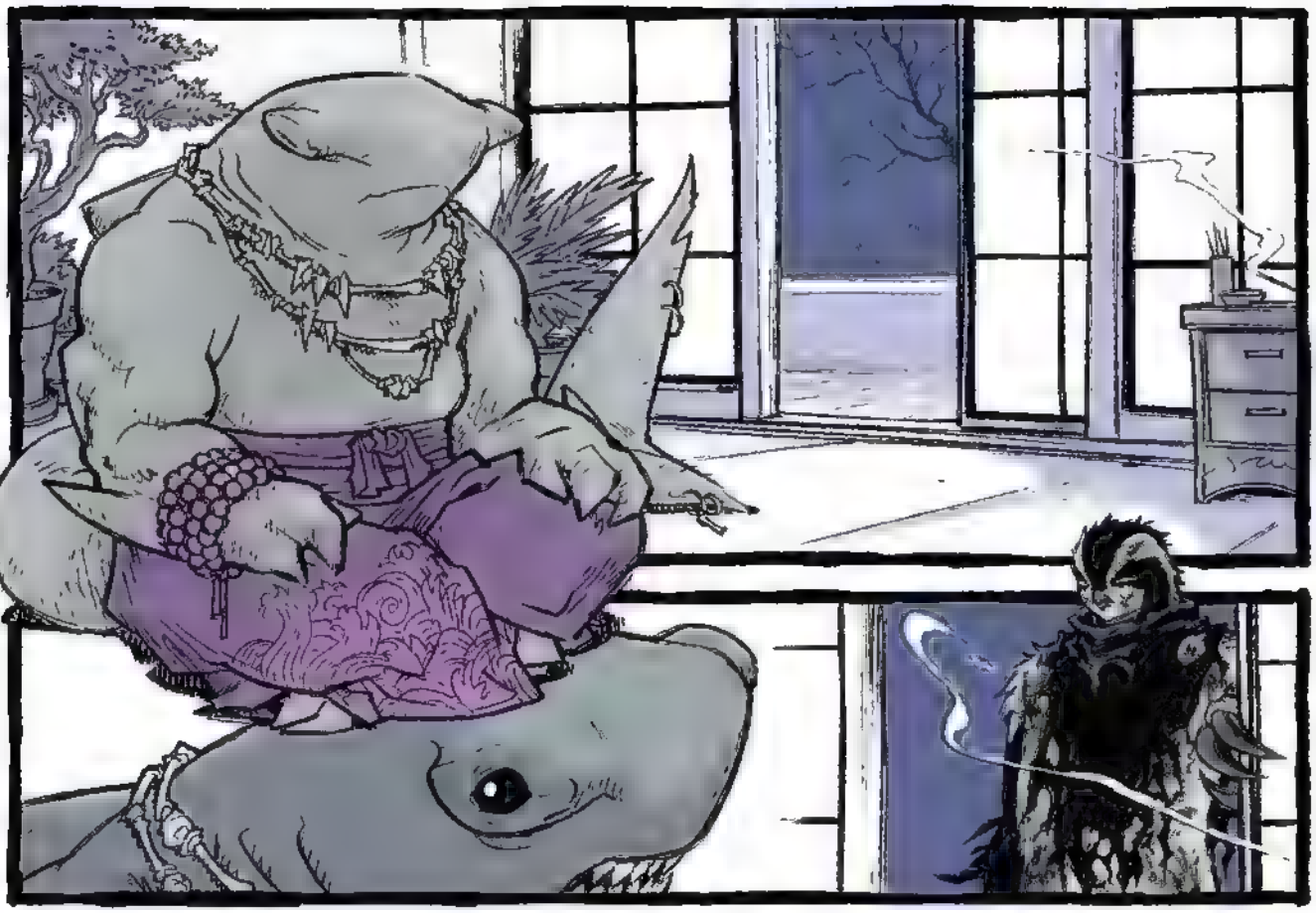
SOPHIE CHOPPEE

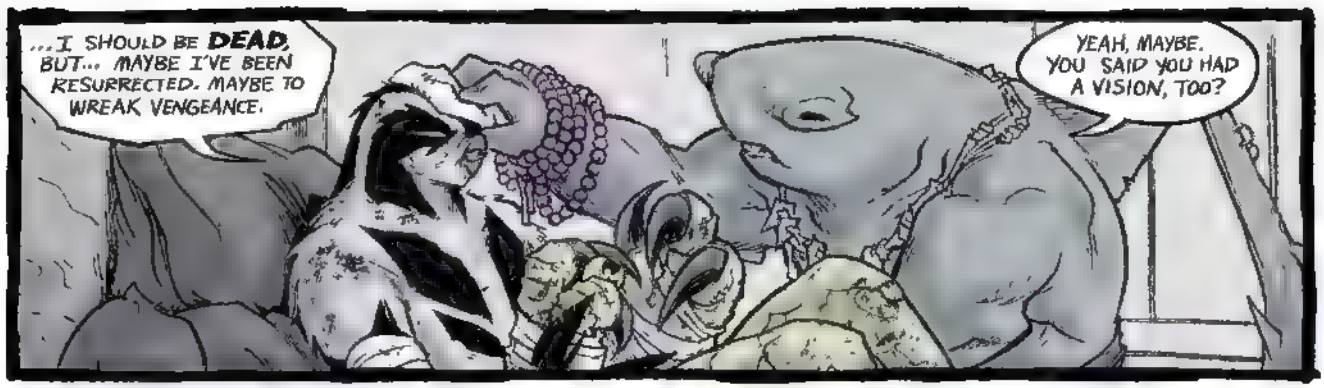
THE NEAR FUTURE
THIS IS THE END.
GET THESE
USELESS THINGS.
PLUCK PLUCK
I AM NOT A THING THAT FLIES.
OFF OF ME.
RUMBLE
PREY

SHRIEK
ugh whyyy...
WHY.. COULDN'T THAT JUST KILL ME...

WHO SAID THAT...?

私は獲物にしてみ
MAKE ME YOUR PREY
こうや
KOYA
I HEAR YOU
早くして
DO IT... NOW
WHAT DO I DO ?




...I SHOULD BE DEAD, BUT... MAYBE I'VE BEEN RESURRECTED. MAYBE TO WREAK VENGEANCE.
YEAH, MAYBE. YOU SAID YOU HAD A VISION, TOO?

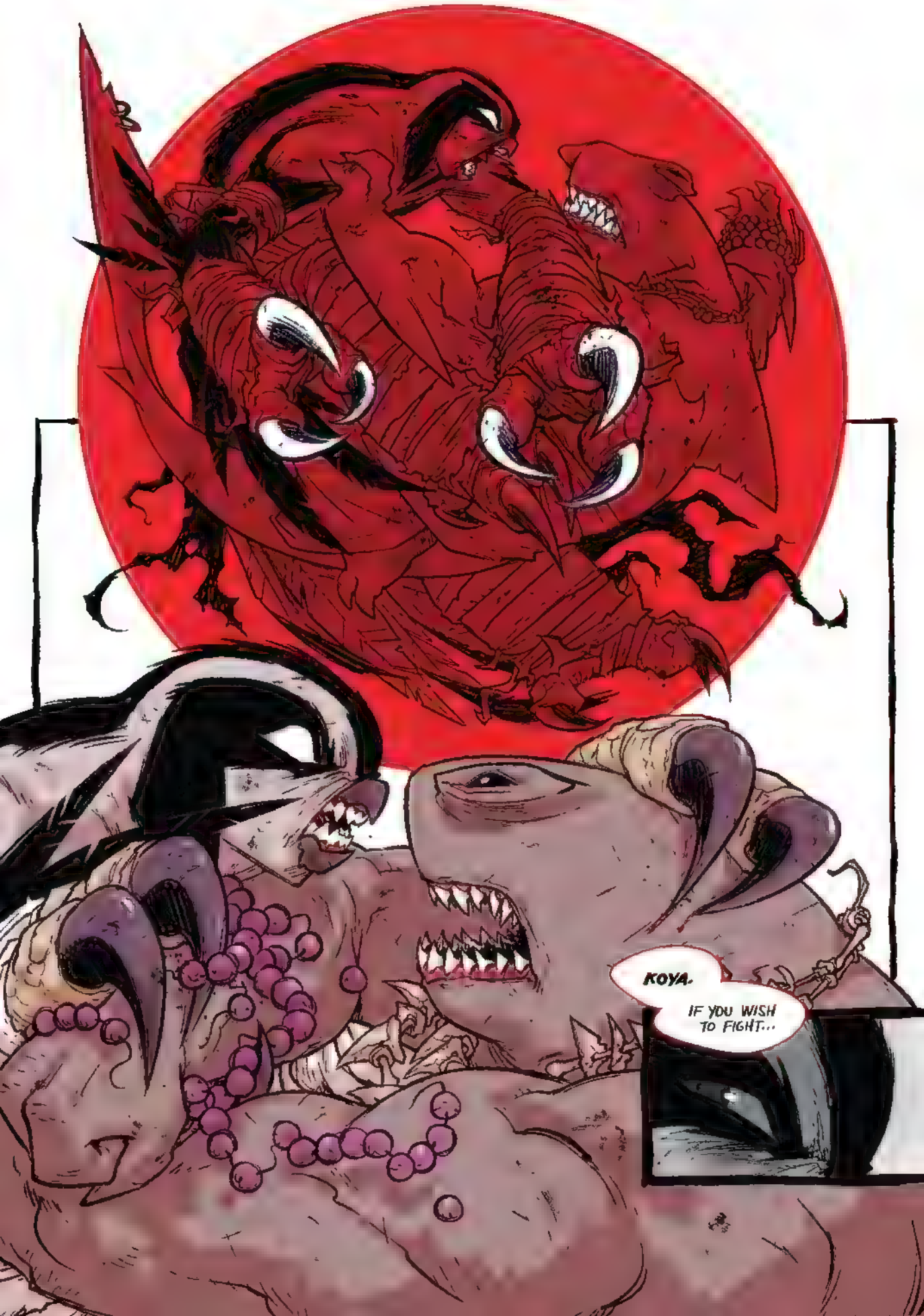
I THINK I SAW A SPIRIT, A GIGANTIC BIRD. AND I HAD MY WINGS AGAIN. IN THE VISION, I MEAN.
THEY WERE BEAUTIFUL AND DEADLY...
HM...

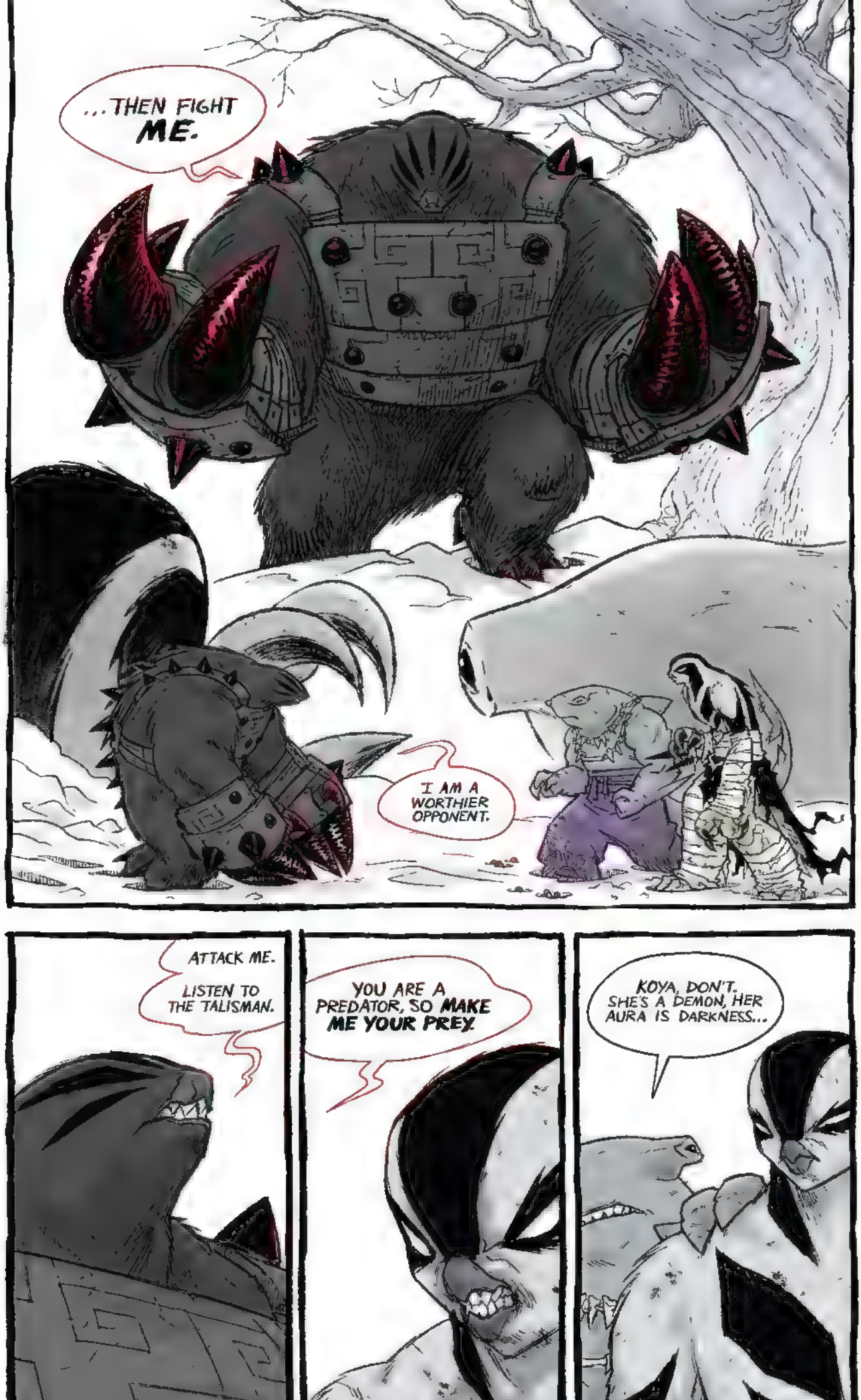
COULD IT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOUR BIRD? THIS THING...?

DON'T TOUCH IT! YOU'LL CONTAMINATE IT!!
SLISH
WELL... I CAN SEE A STRANGE AURA ON IT.
WHO KNOWS WHAT OTHER CURSES AND CREATURES WERE IN THAT CAVE...
WHATEVER, BLUDGEON. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I SAW. I'LL GET THAT SPIRIT TO COME BACK, THEN I'LL MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND.
UGH! IT WASN'T LIKE THIS! THE TREE WAS BURNED AND DESTROYED!! AAAAGH
KOYA...
I BELIEVE YOU, BUT... I WISH YOU COULD FIND PEACE.
I WISH YOU WOULD ACCEPT WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU.
HOW DARE YOU.

I'VE ACCEPTED MY PLACE.
I'VE ACCEPTED THAT I WAS FORCEFULLY CHANGED...
...BUT I WILL NOT LET LEONARDO GO UNCHANGED!
AND I DON'T NEED TO FLY TO DO THAT.
THOSE TURTLES STOLE PIECES OF BOTH OF US.
YOU ACT LIKE YOU'RE ENLIGHTENED BUT YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HASN'T ACCEPTED ANYTHING.
I'M TRYING TO MOVE FORWARD AND BE SOMEONE NEW, AND I WON'T LET YOU STAND IN MY WAY.
KOYA, YOUR AURA ...

...THAT THING'S ENERGY IS ALL OVER YOU...
SSSSSSHH
AAAAA


KOYA.
IF YOU WISH TO FIGHT...


...THEN FIGHT ME.
I AM A WORTHIER OPPONENT.
ATTACK ME.
LISTEN TO THE TALISMAN.
YOU ARE A PREDATOR, SO MAKE ME YOUR PREY.
KOYA, DON'T. SHE'S A DEMON, HER AURA IS DARKNESS...

OCHO... HOW DO I LISTEN TO THIS THING? TELL ME.
ANSWER ME
RRAAAH THEN DIE
KRUNCH

STOP!!
YOU COWARD!
SHOOM
WHERE ARE YOU
I'LL DESTROY YOU
POW

早くして
DO IT NOW
'I CAN'T...
I HAVE SEEN
YOUR RESOLUTE RAGE
YOUR FEARLESS DREAMS
THEY'RE ALL LIES.
I'M FALLING BUT I'M POWERLESS.
I AM A LIE.
YOU ARE NOT A PREDATOR AFTER ALL.

YOU ARE A GENTLE HARMLESS THING
NO. SHUT UP.
I'M NOT...
THEN SHOW ME
YOU
ARE
MINE

BLUDGEON! I DID IT!
YOUR AURA IS MAGNIFICENT!

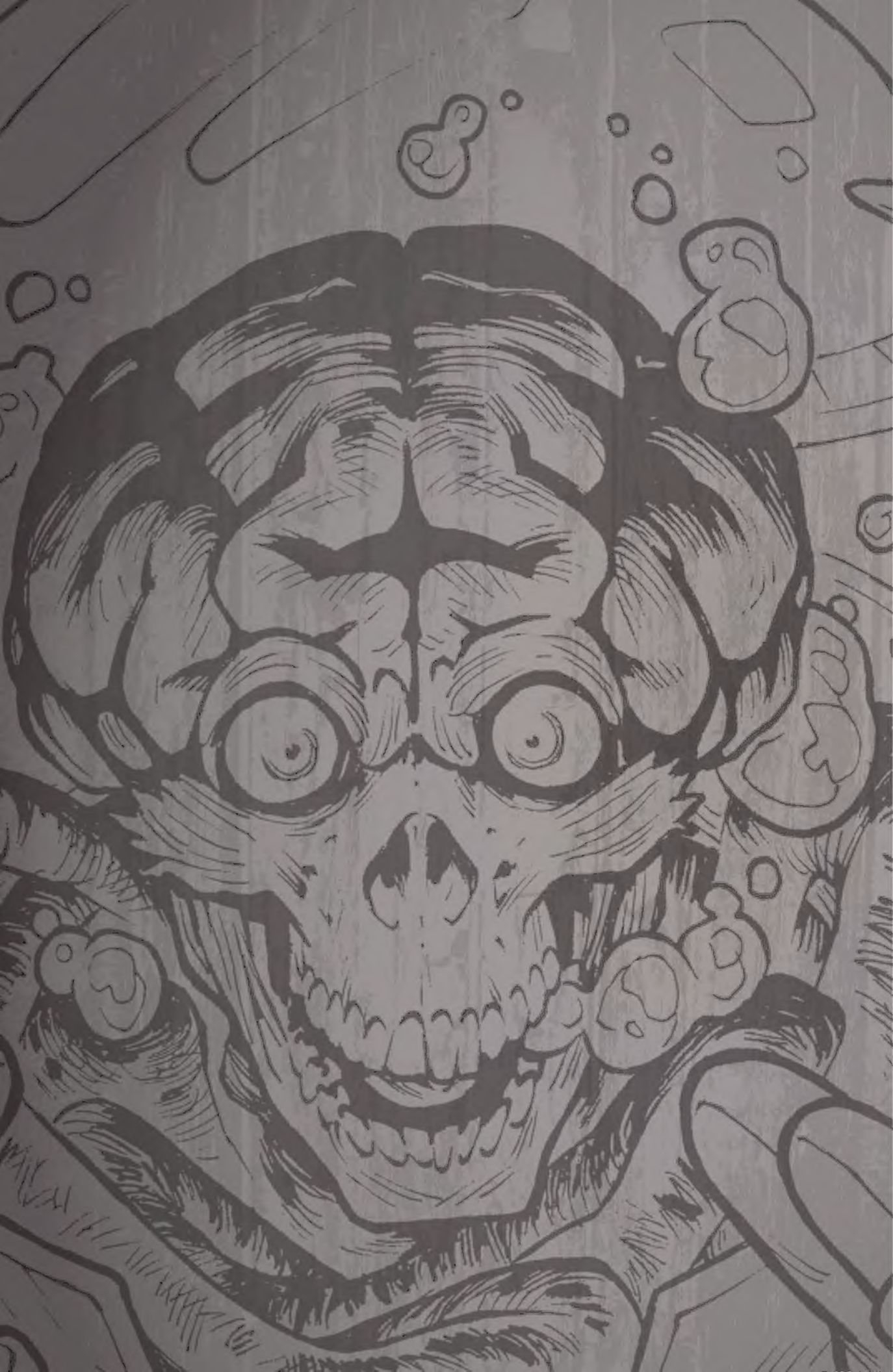
AND NOW FOR YOU—
SAM!
THANK YOU. I UNDERSTAND NOW.
KOYA... I UNDERSTAND NOW, TOO. I'M SORRY I DOUBTED YOU.
DON'T DO IT AGAIN, OR I'LL LOVINGLY FLAY THE SKIN FROM YOUR ENTIRE BODY.
I ACCEPT THAT.
SO, WHAT NOW?
...VENGEANCE.
THE END

art by LEILA DEL DUCA

BRORI ORISKO

art by DYLAN BURNETT

art by KEVIN EASTMAN
colors by TOMI VARGA



AGENT BISHOP'S LONG-GESTATING HUNT FOR MUTANTS BEGINS IN EARNEST AND NO ONE IS SAFE! THE MUTANIMALS ARE THE FIRST TARGETS, BUT THE TURTLES' TURN WILL COME SOON ENOUGH, AND THEY'LL BE HOUNDED LIKE NEVER BEFORE. ALOPEX AND NOBODY ARE LOOKING FOR A LITTLE REST AND RELAXATION BUT GET MORE THAN THEY ASK FOR WHEN THEY BECOME THE UNWILLING GUESTS OF A NEVER-ENDING PARTY THROWN BY THE HEDONISTIC TOAD BARON! PLUS, KARAI HAS ALWAYS EMBODIED THE FOOT CLAN. WITH THE CLAN UNDER THE CONTROL OF SPLINTER, WHAT PATH WILL SHE TAKE DURING HER TRAVELS IN JAPAN? DANGER AND INTRIGUE AWAIT HER, KOYA, AND BLUDGEON!

VOLUME 9 COLLECTS ISSUES #67-72 OF THE ONGOING ***TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES*** SERIES, ***TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES UNIVERSE*** ISSUES #9-15, AND THE ***TMNT/USAGI YOJIMBO*** CROSSOVER.

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